National Library of Canada
Acquisitions and Bibliographic Services Branch
395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada
Direction des acquisitions et des services bibliographiques
395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

Canada

University of Alberta

# Opposition and Literacy Among Girls In an Inner-City Classroom

by

Carol Leroy

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Elementary Education

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall 1995

National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

*Your file Votre référence*

*Our file Notre référence*

THE AUTHOR HAS GRANTED AN IRREVOCABLE NON-EXCLUSIVE LICENCE ALLOWING THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CANADA TO REPRODUCE, LOAN, DISTRIBUTE OR SELL COPIES OF HIS/HER THESIS BY ANY MEANS AND IN ANY FORM OR FORMAT, MAKING THIS THESIS AVAILABLE TO INTERESTED PERSONS.

L'AUTEUR A ACCORDE UNE LICENCE IRREVOCABLE ET NON EXCLUSIVE PERMETTANT A LA BIBLIOTHEQUE NATIONALE DU CANADA DE REPRODUIRE, PRETER, DISTRIBUER OU VENDRE DES COPIES DE SA THESE DE QUELQUE MANIERE ET SOUS QUELQUE FORME QUE CE SOIT POUR METTRE DES EXEMPLAIRES DE CETTE THESE A LA DISPOSITION DES PERSONNE INTERESSEES.

THE AUTHOR RETAINS OWNERSHIP OF THE COPYRIGHT IN HIS/HER THESIS. NEITHER THE THESIS NOR SUBSTANTIAL EXTRACTS FROM IT MAY BE PRINTED OR OTHERWISE REPRODUCED WITHOUT HIS/HER PERMISSION.

L'AUTEUR CONSERVE LA PROPRIETE DU DROIT D'AUTEUR QUI PROTEGE SA THESE. NI LA THESE NI DES EXTRAITS SUBSTANTIELS DE CELLE-CI NE DOIVENT ETRE IMPRIMES OU AUTREMENT REPRODUITS SANS SON AUTORISATION.

ISBN 0-612-06245-7

Canada

**University of Alberta**

**Library Release Form**

**Name of Author:** Carol Leroy

**Title of Thesis:** Opposition and Literacy Among Girls in an Inner-City Classroom

**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

**Year this Degree Granted:** 1995

Permission is hereby granted to the University of Alberta Library to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly, or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the copyright in the thesis, and except as hereinbefore provided, neither the thesis nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatever without the author's prior written permission.

Carol Leroy

#202 1830 College Avenue
Regina, Saskatchewan
S4P 1C2

SEPT. 29, 1995
Date

**University of Alberta**

**Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research**

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Opposition and Literacy Among Girls in an Inner-City Classroom* submitted by *Carol Leroy* in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy*.

Dr. G. Malicky

Dr. B. Bain

Dr. M. Juliebö

Dr. J. Blakey

Dr. M. Cronin

Dr. M. Iveson

Dr. C. Gordon

Date: SEPT. 29, 1995

Abstract

Research indicates that marginalization from the dominant society causes children to oppose schooling in general, and school-based reading and writing in particular, and that this opposition impedes their development of literacy. However, there has been limited study of this problem as it pertains to the urban Canadian context and to girls.

The purpose of this study was to explore girls' opposition in an inner-city classroom, and the nature of the relationship between this opposition and the girls' reading and writing. A qualitative approach was used in the study. Over a period of six months a fifth grade inner-city classroom was observed on a regular basis, and informal interviews were held with the children and their teacher. On the basis of a preliminary analysis of the interviews and observations, three girls were selected to be the focus of the study, and an interpretation was made of their accounts of their relationships with their families, peers, and teacher, as well as their reading and writing.

The three girls engaged in overt and covert opposition in the classroom, but how they did so varied from girl to girl, as the did the strength and consistency of the opposition which they displayed in the classroom. The variations in their opposition seemed to be related to differences in the nature of the relationships they had with adults outside of the school, the extent to which they

thought schooling would make a difference to their futures, the extent of conflict which tney encountered among friends, and the extent to which they experienced reading and writing as social and pleasurable activities.

Implications were drawn for teaching, particularly with respect to the need to foster trust in the classroom and provide greater support for schools where children are experiencing extensive problems. Implications were drawn for further research.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am grateful to the committee members for the guidance and support they provided throughout the study. Dr. Grace Malicky provided countless insights, thoughtful suggestions, and critical questions that guided me through this work. Dr. Jan Blakey provided helpful feedback and support, as did Dr. Bruce Bain and Dr. Margaret Iveson, who did a great deal to help me put the study in perspective. Dr. Moira Juliebo and Dr. Tracy Derwing were also generous in reading my work and providing feedback. As well, Dr. Christine Gordon and Dr. Mary Cronin contributed exceptionally thoughtful comments and questions that helped me clarify my ideas.

There are many other people who helped me out in various ways. Special thanks are due to David Calhoon and additional friends, fellow graduate students and professors who are too numerous to list here.

I would also like to thank Mrs. T., her students, and all the staff at Stanton School for sharing their experiences with me and for teaching me so much about life and learning.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

**CHAPTER ONE** Page

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY..... 1
Background to the Study..... 1
Overview of the Study..... 3
Overview of the Thesis..... 3

**CHAPTER TWO**

OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE..... 5
Conceptual Framework for Literacy Learning..... 5
Reading and Writing..... 5
Learning and Teaching Language..... 6
Authority and Control in Learning..... 7
Opposition to Schooling..... 10
Some Roots of Opposition..... 12
Classroom Communication..... 11
Structural Inequalities..... 15
Summary..... 24

**CHAPTER THREE**

METHODOLOGY..... 26
Qualitative Research..... 26
Identifying a Setting and Gaining Entry..... 27
Observations and Interviews..... 28
Observations..... 28
Interviewing the Children..... 29
Interviewing the Teacher..... 31
Interpreting the Data..... 31
Summary..... 34

**CHAPTER FOUR**

THE CLASS..... 36
The Children's Backgrounds..... 36
Socioeconomic Status..... 36
Problems in Home and Community..... 37
Ethnicity and Peer Groups..... 38
Behaviourial Problems..... 40
The Teacher..... 41
Organization of the Language Arts Class..... 43
Seating Arrangements and Rules..... 43
Provision of Instruction..... 45
Whole-Class Instruction..... 45
Individualized Activities..... 46
Provision of Individual Assistance..... 49
Other Reading and Writing Activities..... 51
Summary..... 53

**CHAPTER FIVE**

CATHY..... 56
Talking With Cathy..... 56
Cathy and Her Family..... 59
Protection, Discipline, and Caring..... 59
Conflict and Talk..... 61

Schooling and the Future..... 64
Cathy and Her Peers..... 66
Female Friends..... 66
Boys..... 73
Cathy and Her Teacher..... 76
Summary of Compliance and Opposition..... 83
Cathy's Reading and Writing..... 85
The Learning Centres..... 85
Reading Books..... 88
Creative Writing..... 93
The Dialogue Journal..... 97
Summary of Cathy's Reading and Writing.....100

**CHAPTER SIX**
ELAINE
Talking With Elaine.....101
Elaine and Her Family.....103
Accounts of Talk in the Home.....105
Home, Schooling, and the Future.....107
Relationships with Peers.....109
Girls.....109
Boys.....114
Elaine and Her Teacher.....116
Summary of Compliance and Opposition.....123
Elaine's Reading and Writing.....125
Reading Books.....125
Creative Writing.....135
The Dialogue Journal.....137
Summary of Elaine's Reading and Writing.....139

**CHAPTER SEVEN**
SHANNON.....140
Talking With Shannon.....140
Shannon and Her Family.....147
Ethnic Identity.....147
Shifts in Family Relationships.....149
Rejection.....152
Coping.....153
The Future.....156
Shannon and Her Peers.....156
Being Tough.....156
Locating Friends.....159
Loneliness.....161
Shannon and Her Teacher.....164
Shannon's Reading and Writing.....173
Summary of Shannon's Reading and Writing.....182

**CHAPTER EIGHT**
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS.....183
Summary and Discussion of Findings.....183
Girls' Covert and Overt Opposition.....183
Relationships With Adults.....186
Peer Groups.....189
Schooling and Future Aspirations.....192

Relationship with the Teacher.....193
Opposition and Reading and Writing.....195
Implications for Teaching.....197
Implications for Further Research.....202

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**.....206

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of girls' opposition in a fifth grade inner-city classroom and the ways in which this opposition was related to their involvement in school-based reading and writing. In this chapter I will provide an overview of why and how the study was carried out.

### Background to the Study

As Contenta (1993) observes, student opposition in schools is so commonplace that it is "tempting to see it as something instinctual" (p. 9). In many cases this opposition seems to be a sporadic and normal, if not healthy, response to the everyday restrictions that schools impose on children. In other cases, however, student opposition seems to be more persistent and extreme, and it seriously disrupts teaching and learning in schools. Many writers have suggested that when this occurs among students who are marginalized from the dominant society by virtue of their ethnicity, race, and/or gender, it is because their opposition to schooling is a deeply rooted cultural response to social conflicts and unequal opportunities in the broader society (e.g., Erickson, 1993; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Labov, 1972; Ogbu, 1993).

Moreover, it has been suggested that for students who are not part of the dominant society, school-based reading and writing are of particular significance in relation to student opposition (e.g., Giroux, 1983; Labov, 1972; Ogbu, 1993). Freire and Macedo (1987) argue that this is because our reading and writing are extensions of how we perceive and act upon the world. That is, if students view reading and writing as extensions of a social context in which they do not have power to act upon the world, they will refuse to engage in these activities. However, because they refuse to engage in these activities, they further diminish their opportunities to play an active role in the dominant society. Thus, their refusal to read and write in schools is said to have the paradoxical result of entrenching the social problems that gave rise to the opposition in the first place (e.g., Shor, 1992.)

In order to develop better literacy programs for children in marginalized areas like the local inner-city, it is essential that we develop a better understanding of opposition to schooling among students in this area, and the nature of the relationship between this opposition and their reading and writing. As will be discussed more fully in Chapter Two, there has been insufficient research on this problem, particularly as it pertains to Canadian inner-city schools and as it pertains to girls.

## Overview of the Study

The study was designed to be a qualitative one (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Cresswell, 1994), in which I observed and interviewed fifth grade children in an inner-city classroom over a period of six months. The study began as an open-ended investigation into the children's reading and writing in the classroom, and evolved around the following questions:

1. How do girls engage in opposition in an inner-city classroom?
2. How is this opposition rooted in the girls' social experiences with their families, peers, and teacher?
3. How is this opposition interrelated with the girls' learning of reading and writing in the classroom?

## Overview of the Thesis

In Chapter Two I will discuss the conceptual framework for understanding children's literacy learning and provide an overview of the research on opposition in schools among students who are not members of the dominant society. Chapter Three provides information about the research design and methods that were used to collect and interpret the data. Chapter Four describes the classroom context of the study, with an emphasis on its Language Arts program. Chapters Five, Six, and Seven present portraits of the three girls and their reading and writing in the classroom. Finally, in Chapter Eight, a summary and discussion of the

results of the study will be provided, as well as a discussion of implications for teaching practice and research.

# CHAPTER TWO

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purposes of this chapter are to describe the conceptual framework that was used in this study to explore learning of reading and writing and to provide an overview of the literature related to opposition in schools among students who are not members of the dominant society, particularly as it pertains to their reading and writing.

### Conceptual Framework for Literacy Learning

#### Reading and Writing

Reading and writing are complex social processes that involve the composition of meaning with printed text (Tierney & Pearson, 1989). When we read, we converse with real and imaginary authors; and when we write, we converse with members of the audience, as we imagine them to be (Rosenblatt, 1989). These conversations can take a variety of directions, depending on our backgrounds and the purposes which we bring to reading and writing. Sometimes our attention is on the aesthetic experience of reading or writing, or the "sensations, images, feelings, and ideas" that are evoked by the text (Rosenblatt, 1989, p. 159). At other times, we attend to the meaning that "results from abstracting and analytically structuring the ideas, information, directions, or conclusions" that are composed through reading and writing (Rosenblatt, 1989, p. 159).

As Street (1994) points out, our reading and writing

are also "connected with much deeper cultural values about identity, personhood, and relationships" (p. 20), because how we read and write cannot be separated from who we think we are, and what we think counts as meaning. And in turn, what we think counts in meaning is shaped by a complex network of social relationships and ideology which tell us what counts as authority in learning (Lankshear & MacLaren, 1993; Street, 1994).

## Learning and Teaching Language

Reading and writing involve thinking and using language, and the learning of these processes is governed by the same basic principle which Vygotsky suggests underlies all learning:

> Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)...all the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57)

Bruner uses the term "scaffolding" (1986, p. 73) to describe the social support which needs to be provided to inexperienced users of oral and written language so that they can learn how to use language independently. Scaffolding involves structuring or organizing the process for the learner, helping the learner identify problems,

focusing the learner's attention, and carrying out parts of the activity which the learner cannot yet do independently. Scaffolding enables the learner to make meaning within his or her zone of proximal development, which Vygotsky defines in the following way:

> It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86)

Through using the other's guidance and collaboration, the child's zone of proximal development is constantly advancing. As it advances, the scaffolding that was essential at one level of problem solving becomes unnecessary, and the support is withdrawn, only to be reestablished at progressively more difficult levels of problem-solving and meaning-making. In this way, the child's development is "continually moving forward" (Erickson, 1993, p. 36).

## Authority and Control in Learning

Additional writers have commented on the tensions and paradoxes in establishing authority, control, and ownership over meaning-making in that collaborative venture which we call learning. Searle (1984) suggests that, "the adequacy of the metaphor implied by scaffolding hinges on the question

of who is constructing the edifice" (p. 482). He reminds us that the intentions behind the meaning-making must remain those of the learner, and he notes that in too many examples of "scaffolding" it is apparent that the child has been expected to fit information into a structure that was set up and fixed by the teacher, rather than being allowed and encouraged to appropriate the teacher's structure to create his or her own meaning.

In order to appropriate this structure to make their own meanings, students must have opportunities to engage in dialogue in which all participants are "simultaneously teachers and students" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 59). In order for such a dialogue to occur, teachers must be open and flexible to the meanings created by their students and thus be willing to engage as learners with their students. And in turn, students must play an active role in their learning and thus engage as teachers with their teachers:

> Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education. (Freire & Macedo, 1987)

The notion of dialogue centres on a tension in the roles played by students and teachers in controlling meaning-making. Van Manen (1991) suggests that recognition of this tension in control over learning has been central to

the concept of "pedagogy" since the time of the ancient Greeks, when the word "pedagogue" referred to the slave who led the child to school but walked behind him (p. 37). He suggests that this tension is particularly strong when the students are children, because children are not yet able to assume full authority and responsibility for their own behaviour and learning. They need adults who can take this responsibility for them, but adult responsibility for children's learning needs to be of the kind that helps children construct their own meanings and directions. That is, their teachers need to provide, "controlled freedom as well as control that pushes freedom forward" (1991, p. 62).

Teaching and learning are thus processes in which "one must lean forward into a constantly shifting relationship" (Erickson, 1993, p. 36), as authority over the process shifts from teacher to child and back again. Authority in this shifting relationship is not something that teachers can impose on children. Instead, when teachers have authority over learning, it has been granted to them by the students:

> The child, in a manner of speaking, authorizes the adult directly and indirectly to be morally responsive to the values that ensure the child's well-being and growth toward mature self-responsibility. (Van Manen, 1991, p. 70)

As Van Manen (1991) suggests, this authorization does

not occur unless the child feels able to trust the adult to provide necessary support, guidance, and structure while at the same time respecting the child's need and desire to take control over his or her own learning. Erickson puts it this way:

> Assent to the exercise of authority involves trust that its exercise will be benign. This involves a leap of faith--trust in the legitimacy of the authority and in the good intentions of exercising it, trust that one's own identity will be maintained positively in relation to the authority, and trust that one's own interests will be advanced through compliance with the exercise of authority. (1993, p. 36)

## Opposition to Schooling

For the purpose of this study, "opposition to schooling" refers to children's non-acceptance of teacher authority over their behaviour and learning. Prior to discussing the literature on this topic, it is important to note that in much of this literature the term "resistance" is used to mean "opposition to schooling." However, in many contexts of academic writing, the term "resistance" has multiple connotations which can cause confusion. For example, Willis (1978) used the term to refer specifically to the active nature of student opposition to authority; but other writers, such as Shor (1992), use it to refer to the

passive acceptance of teacher authority; and still others use the word to refer to both passive acceptance of this authority and active rebellion against it (e.g., Contenta, 1993). As well, even though the term was originally coined to denote the response of students to restrictive schooling practices (Willis, 1978), the term is now increasingly being used to describe student responses to critical literacy programs and action research (e.g., Giroux, 1993; Lather, 1991), not always with the distinction that needs to be made between "resistance that is oriented toward survival and resistance that is engaged in the service of liberation." (Robinson & Ward, 1991, p. 96).

Thus, in order to avoid confusion, when the term "resistance" is used in the following discussion it refers specifically to student opposition to teacher authority over learning. In the current study, "overt opposition" refers to opposition that is clearly and explicitly rebellious (such as talking-back to teachers, deliberately violating major behaviourial rules, and openly refusing to work), and "covert opposition" refers to opposition that is more hidden and thus is more subtle and ambiguous. In the classroom, this usually involves what Contenta calls a "work slowdown" (1993, p. 34), with accompanying behaviours such as pretending to misunderstand or to forget instructions, remaining silent when the teacher asks questions, and so on. However, in most of the literature discussed in the

following section, a distinction is not made between these two forms of opposition.

Some Roots of Opposition Among Marginalized Students

Opposition and Classroom Communication

As D'Amato (1993) points out, several studies in the "cultural difference" (p. 191) tradition have identified the significance of classroom communication in supporting or impeding opposition in the classrooms of youth who are not part of the dominant society, even though the intention of some of these studies was not to study classroom conflicts specifically.

One of these studies was the ethnographic project carried out by Heath (1983) over a period of ten years in South Carolina. In this study Heath observed that in the African American working class community of Trackton, there were a number of differences between the community and schools with respect to how oral and written language were used. When she worked with teachers to adapt school-based uses of language and literacy to match those of the community, she found a marked improvement in the children's participation in, and learning of, reading and writing. Her interpretation was that the children's participation in lessons improved because the changes had made the instruction more meaningful for the children.

Another set of cultural difference studies has been carried out at the Kamehameha school in Hawaii, which is

attended by children of Native Hawaiian ancestry (Au & Jordan, 1981; Au and Mason, 1981; D'Amato, 1993; Vogt, Jordan & Tharp, 1993). These studies involved collaborative projects to implement changes to reading and writing instruction in the elementary grades, and to monitor the results of these changes. As Heath (1983) had found in her research, the researchers in these Hawaiian studies concluded that the most productive changes were those which enhanced the emphasis on meaning in reading and writing, facilitated peer interaction, and provided the children with opportunities to use forms of communication which were similar to those used in the community. These changes resulted in greater participation by the children in reading activities (Au & Mason, 1981) and improved scores on reading tests (Au & Jordan, 1981).

One interpretation of these results is that the use of culturally familiar communication makes it easier for the children to understand the teacher's instruction. However, another interpretation is that the use of culturally familiar communication signals to children a redistribution of power in the classroom, and this makes the instruction more acceptable to them (Au & Mason, 1981; Erickson, 1988). The implication of this second interpretation is that when the teacher accepts the children's talk, then they are more likely to accept the teacher's. As well, it has been suggested that encouraging children to talk to peers in

small groups "reduces the teacher's visibility as a figure of authority" and so he or she becomes less of a target for opposition (D'Amato, 1993, p. 203). However, in Heath's (1983) study and in the Hawaiian ones, the children were not interviewed about their perceptions of their teachers and classroom communication, and so this interpretation remains an open one.

The finding that providing for students' meanings and peer communication in the classroom is important to reducing opposition to school-based reading or writing is not limited to classrooms which are attended by children who are not part of the dominant society. For example, in a comparative study of mainstream high school English classrooms, it was found that students opposed the teacher less in the classroom where the teacher was more accepting of students' "personal knowledge" (Alpert, 1991, p. 359) in class discussions and in their reading and their writing. However, a number of writers have argued that teachers' acceptance of students' communication is more important for children from marginalized groups (groups which have a lower socioeconomic status, and/or ethnic and cultural minorities) than for children from the dominant society, because the former children have less of what D'Amato (1993) calls a "structural rationale" (p. 190) for accepting school authority. In the following section, this argument will be explored more fully.

Structural Inequalities and Opposition

Several researchers have suggested that when students who are not part of the dominant society oppose schooling and school-based reading and writing, this opposition is rooted in societal conflicts and unequal opportunity outside of the school, rather than in specific teaching practices within schools.

One of these researchers is William Labov (1972, 1982), who carried out a series of ethnographic studies with male African American youth who were members of inner-city youth subcultures. His studies were initially driven by the perceived need to know how their dialect of English was interfering with their learning of reading and writing. What he found, however, was that features of the African American dialect did not account for the boys' low achievement in reading. Instead, he stated that the boys' reading problems were the result of "a conflict in our society between two opposed cultures" (1982, p. 148). More specifically, in his interviews with the boys he found they perceived their dialect to be unacceptable to teachers; and they thought that even if they did adopt a more standard form of English, they would not be able to compete with mainstream youth in schools or on the job market. Thus, for them there was little incentive to demonstrate mastery of the oral or written language of the school.

As well, Labov stated that those youth who chose to

associate and gain status with other African American youth recognized the importance of signalling their identity by using the local African American dialect and conforming to oppositional behaviourial norms in the local youth culture. The result was that the boys who had the highest status in the peer groups were the ones with the lowest scores on reading tests, even though Labov observed that these boys were among the brightest and presumably had the most potential for achievement in reading. It remains unclear, however, whether this would apply to children from other minority groups, and whether it would apply to girls as well as to boys. Moreover, because Labov did not examine classroom dynamics or the curriculum for these youth, his study did not explore the potential for classroom changes to make a difference to student opposition.

Ogbu's (1978, 1987, 1993) extensive ethnographic work among African Americans in Stockton, California also explored the relationship between opposition to schooling, and achievement in school-based reading. Like Labov, he found in his interviews and observations that in the African American community there is a widespread belief that schooling will not make a difference to the futures of the youth, and this belief is conveyed to children from a young age. He also found that among African American youth, there are strong pressures to conform to cultural norms (displayed through language, dress, and other cultural symbols) that

have emerged in opposition to the mainstream culture. Ogbu suggested that for these youth, achievement in school-based reading is incompatible with acceptance in the African American community, and that this incompatibility creates psychological conflicts which account for their generally poor performance on tests of reading ability. He also suggested that this phenomenon would apply to children of both sexes:

> The psychological pressures come about because the minority individual who desires to do well in school may also define the behaviour enhancing school success and the success itself as "acting white." Knowing/fearing that striving for academic success and the success itself may result in loss of minority peer affiliation and support, and at the same time being uncertain of white acceptance and support if he or she succeeds in learning to act white, creates a personal conflict for the student (1993, p. 102).

However, like Labov, Ogbu did not provide accounts of interactions within schools, nor did he explore the curricula in the schools in the areas where he carried out his research.

Ogbu (1988) suggests that opposition to schooling is unique to members of "castelike minorities" (p. 237), or visible minorities whose job opportunities are restricted by

racial discrimination. However, the findings of his study are similar to those of Willis (1978), who carried out a major ethnographic study of twelve male working-class caucasian youth who engaged in extensive acts of opposition against school authorities. One theme that emerged in the latter study was the relationship between opposition to schooling and the students' beliefs about the prospects of upward mobility through schooling, which Willis said was "so remote as to be meaningless" (p. 127) for his subjects.

Another theme concerned the importance of the peer group in developing and sustaining student opposition to schooling. For the boys in Willis' study the peer group drew its identity from the culture of the shopfloor, or labouring jobs, where some of youth worked part time. Central to this culture was the display of opposition to authority, as well as disdain for, and harassment of, those who were deemed to be weak, such as members of ethnic minorities, girls, and males who conformed to authority. Like Labov (1972) and Ogbu (1987), Willis found in his study that the peer group became for its members a source of self-esteem and power and, in turn, required from its members an ongoing boycott of the "mental work" (p. 149) which was associated with schooling. Willis (1978) did not specifically explore his participants' reading and writing, but the implication was that they rarely engaged in these activities.

In contrast to Labov and Ogbu, Willis (1978) made

repeated reference to the significance of gender identity to the opposition which he observed among his participants. He noted that, for them, opposition to schooling and mental work was an outcome of their need to prove their masculinity:

> Mental activity for "the lads" is not only barred because of their particular experience of the institution of the school, but also because it is regarded as effeminate....What they take as mental work becomes for "the lads" mere "pen-pushing," "not really doing things" and, most importantly, "cissy": it is not basically man's work or within the manly scope of action. (p. 149)

The corollary might be that, because mental work was considered to be feminine, girls in this context would be more accepting of teacher authority than boys are. However, because Willis did not include girls in his study, he did not explore the implications of the preceding view for girls' opposition to teacher authority.

Wolcott (1987) and McLaren (1989) are two additional writers who lend support to the idea that social conflicts are at the root of opposition to schools. Wolcott's (1987) ideas are based on his one-year experience as a teacher and ethnographer at a Kwagiutl village in British Columbia. During this time he faced extensive opposition from his students to his teaching, and he stated that it was unclear

whether this was because he "was white, the teacher, a cranky adult, or all of them" (p. 141). He suggested that in their writing the students distinguished the work in the classroom from "real work and real rewards of adult life" (p. 143). Yet, when he tried to adapt the curriculum to make it more meaningful to the students, they resisted these adaptations because they "held very rigid expectations" about the nature of activities that would be appropriate in school. For example, they preferred workbook activities to journal writing or reading books of their own choices. Wolcott (1987) concluded that "they disliked school and this is how they liked it," (p. 141) and he attributed this to antagonistic relations between the Kwagiutl community and that of the dominant society. The tacit implication is that these antagonistic relations affected girls in the same way that they affected boys.

McLaren's (1989) observations in a "suburban ghetto" (p. 25) elementary school in Toronto are, like those of Wolcott (1987), based on reflection upon his experiences as teacher. In his accounts of teaching in this area, he wrote that problems of poverty, violence, drug and alcohol abuse, sexism and racism were rampant in the school. Like the preceding researchers, he suggested that the students were in a "double-bind" situation (p. 215) because of the conflict between their street culture and that of the school. That is, if they tried to achieve school success

they would risk the loss of "their own cultural capital, street-corner knowledge, and dignity" (p. 215), without sufficient guarantee that such a loss would be compensated by success in the mainstream society. In this way, students from a variety of ethnic groups were identified by McLaren to be in the same situation identified by Labov (1972, 1982), Ogbu (1978, 1988, 1993), and Willis (1978)--a situation of cultural conflict that caused the students to oppose schooling.

More specifically, McLaren (1989) reported that the girls whom he taught engaged in "abrasive behaviour" with peers and school authorities as a way of rejecting "middle-class propriety" (p. 216). This behaviour included dressing provocatively and wearing make-up, talking back to teachers, and fighting. McLaren stated that this oppositional behaviour stemmed from their fatalistic acceptance of their marginal status as working-class children and as girls in a community where females held less power than did males. As well, in what seemed to be a tacit and otherwise unexplained comparison to boys' opposition, he stated that girls' opposition was supported by "strong emotional bonding" (p. 220) among female friends.

In the British context, opposition among working-class girls was studied by McRobbie (1991) in an ethnographic study of working-class adolescent girls who belonged to a youth subculture in Birmingham, England. She noted that the

girls' future plans revolved around "traditional family values" (p. 58) of marriage and caring for a family. Because of this focus on the domestic sphere, many of the girls' activities and much of their talk centred on romance and the maintenance of relationships, with the result that for these girls school achievement was irrelevant to their futures. However, sometimes they applied themselves to their studies, usually to compete with other girls, and they expressed "a marked preference for English" (p.47), although McRobbie stated that it took some prompting for them to admit this to her.

McRobbie (1991) observed that sometimes these girls engaged in "outright confrontation" with teachers, but more often their activities resulted in "subtle undermining" and "gentle redefinition" (p. 44) of authority in the school. Their tactics were ones of "silence, unambiguous boredom, and immersion in their own private concerns." For example, they appropriated the girls' lavatory at the school to make a space where they could meet and talk, away from boys and teachers. As well, in the classroom the girls engaged in activities such as ignoring teachers and gazing into mirrors and combing hair, which they knew irritated teachers. In what seems to be another tacit but unexplained comparison to boys, McRobbie noted that central to the girls' tactics was that "by building up supportive networks of friends, the oppressive features of schooling were minimised." She also

made the following comparison, even though she did not include boys in her study:

> Girls negotiate different leisure spaces and different personal spaces than those inhabited by boys. These, in turn, offer them different possibilities for "resistance" if indeed that is the right word to use (p. 14).

McRobbie's finding of subtlety in the girls' opposition is consistent with ideas developed by Brown and Gilligan (1992), Gilligan, Lyons, and Hanmer (1990), and Gilligan, Rogers, and Tolman (1991) in their work on girls' psychological development. Based on their interviews with American girls and women at various ages and walks of life, these researchers state that when girls reach adolescence there is a substantial decrease in their willingness to engage in overt conflict and disagreement with others because they become increasingly aware of how easily this engagement can lead to social isolation and/or violence. This awareness evolves through their relationships with others, where they learn to avoid conflict rather than to deal with it openly:

> But solutions designed to protect feelings by ending public conflict simply push strong feelings underground and leave the simmering residue of disagreement, anger, and sadness unspoken and out of relationship. What remains visible, then, are

> the nice feelings, the polite conversations (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p. 105).

The implication is that, to the extent that girls' opposition turns subtle and covert as they approach adolescence, researchers and teachers must be sensitive to ways which girls' opposition in schooling, and reading and writing, might be masked by compliant behaviour.

## Summary

In this chapter I have provided an outline of the conceptual framework used to explore literacy learning in the study. In order to learn to read and write students must be able engage with their teachers in dialogues in which authority and control over meaning are constantly shifting, and which require mutual trust between teacher and students.

This chapter has also provided an overview of the academic literature related to opposition to teachers' authority among students who are not members of the dominant society, and the ways in which this opposition is thought to inhibit their learning of reading and writing. It was noted that some studies indicate that when scope is provided for students' meanings in the classroom, the students are more likely to accept their teachers' authority. It was also noted that acceptance of this authority seems to be diminished when students do not perceive that achievement in schooling will make a difference to their lives, and when they are members of peer groups in which one's status and

identity depend on one's display of opposition in school.

Although opposition is likely an important factor in inner-city girls' literacy learning, we know very little about it. Few studies have included consideration of classroom interactions as well as interviews with children. Most of the related research has been carried out in the United States and Britain, rather than in Canada. As well, it remains uncertain as to whether studies that deal with boys, or group girls and boys together, provide adequate information about girls' opposition in schools. The current study was designed to overcome some of these limitations. In the following chapter, there will be a discussion of the methods used to explore girls' opposition in a local fifth grade inner-city classroom and the nature of the relationship between this opposition and the girls' literacy.

# CHAPTER THREE

## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to provide information about the nature of the qualitative research completed in this study. Information will also be provided about how the site was identified and entry was gained to it and how the observations and interviews were carried out and interpreted.

### Qualitative Research

This study had several features which are characteristic of qualitative research: the research questions were open-ended; there was an emphasis on trying to understand participants' point of view; and research observations and interviews were carried out in a natural setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 1994).

As Creswell (1994) points out, a qualitative approach to research is most appropriate when we are attempting to understand a social problem because, in order to understand social problems, we need to work toward painting an integrated picture of what is going on, while recognizing that what we consider to be reality is both subjective and value-laden. Moreover, because qualitative research is open-ended, it allows for integrated exploration in areas where insufficient groundwork has been laid. I adopted this approach for the current study because I felt that the prior literature did not provide clear directions in terms of the

issues that surround inner-city Canadian girls learning to read and write in schools. This approach enabled me to shift and adjust my focus in accordance with the issues that I found in the setting.

## Identifying a Setting and Gaining Entry

In the city of Edmonton (Alberta) the term "inner-city core" is used to refer to a small geographic area where problems of poverty are the most serious. The term "inner-city" is used to refer to a broader area where poverty-related problems are less extreme. Stanton school is in the latter area. Although it is not in the inner-city core, it is locally known as an inner-city school, has been referred to as such in a city newspaper, and was recommended to me as a prospective research site by many people who have knowledge of schools in the inner-city. Moreover, in a document issued by the school there is mention of many of the challenges which Maynes (1990) describes as characteristic of urban poor schools: multi-ethnicity, a high turnover rate among the students, and family arrangements which are unstable for many of the children.

Preliminary visits to the school took place in December. By January, formal permission for the study had been obtained from the school board and the children's parents. I began carrying out observations in the second week of January, shortly after the children returned from their Christmas break.

## Carrying Out Observations and Interviews

### Observations

The classroom was visited two or three times weekly from January through June. Most of the observations were carried out in the afternoons, during the Language Arts period, but some observations were also carried out at other times of the day. When carrying out observations I usually played a passive role, which Spradley (1980) describes as one in which the researcher "is present at the scene but does not participate or interact to any great extent" (p. 59). That is, I watched various events, took fieldnotes, tape-recorded interactions, and occasionally talked to the children and the teacher while they worked.

When carrying out observations, I tried to avoid any appearance of adopting a teacher role by helping the children with their work or intervening in their behaviour because I might be seen as having expectations in alliance with those of the teacher and, even more problematic, appearing to take sides in a dispute among the children in cases where it was necessary to intervene. When the teacher was in the class it was not difficult for me to refrain from adopting the teacher role, but when she left the room my position became more difficult because I then felt responsible for the children's safety. Over time, the children, teacher, and I reached an agreement that when the teacher was away I could be as strict with the children as I

felt was necessary to avoid conflicts between me and them. The understanding was that when the teacher returned to the class, I would go back to being myself and would not tell the teacher what had happened. The fact that I never violated this policy helped me establish trust with the children.

## Interviewing the Children

All of the children in the class were interviewed and for most children there were four interviews. The interviews all took place in a spare room which was across the hall from the classroom. They were carried out one-on-one and were tape-recorded. Prior to the first set of interviews a schedule was prepared with questions about the children's writing, such as "What were you thinking when you wrote this?" "Do you like what you wrote? Why or why not?" The second set of interviews began the same way the first set did, but now the focus was what the children read, rather than what they wrote. In this interview I began by asking questions like, "What are you reading? How did you select that? What do you think of it?"

Although specific questions were prepared for these interviews, the actual interaction more often than not took the form of "a conversation between two trusting parties," (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 97). In the first two interviews with most of the children, talk about reading, writing, and school led naturally into talk about the children's lives in

the family and community contexts. This usually happened when the child referred to an event which had occurred outside of school and I either remained quiet or asked, "Do you feel like talking about that?" Then I simply followed the child's lead. I tried to avoid pushing the children to talk about their lives outside of the classroom, and I tried to avoid asking direct questions about it until the child had clearly signalled that this was what he or she wished to talk about.

There were two additional interviews with most of the children. In these interviews we followed up on topics that we had discussed earlier, and explored some new ones that had arisen since we last talked. Topics included the children's reading, writing, family and community life, peer interactions, perceptions of the teacher, and the workplace. During the interviews I also frequently shared my interpretations with the children so that they could give me feedback on my ideas.

Sometimes the children provided information which indicated their safety might be at risk, and in these cases I consulted with their teacher and the school's guidance counsellor. In most of these instances the children knew about these consultations and gave approval for them. For the most part, however, they expressed two bigger concerns with respect to confidentiality. First, it was important to them that I not reveal any information about behaviour for

which they could be disciplined. Second, it was important that I not reveal any information to other children. Throughout the study, I was able to respect both of these concerns. By the end of the study, most of the children gave me blanket permission to use my own judgement with respect to how I would use what they told me.

## Interviewing the Teacher

The interviews with the teacher were different from those which were carried out with the children because they were neither scheduled nor tape-recorded. Instead, we spoke together on a casual basis nearly every day of my visits: prior to or after school, during recess and lunch hour, and sometimes during class. There was little distinction on either side with respect to what was on the record for my study and what needed to be kept confidential, what was personal and what was professional, and who was informing whom about what was going on. We had discussed problems with these distinctions in early January and agreed that they could be made later, when I knew what I wished to use in my study and could show her what I had in mind. To deal with these distinctions earlier seemed, to both of us, to cause unnecessary boundaries around what we could say.

## Interpreting the Data

As with most qualitative studies, I interpreted the data while I was collecting it (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 1994). This interpretation included reading and

rereading the children's work, writing and reviewing transcripts of interviews, going over fieldnotes, and writing my thoughts and feelings in a journal. As well, I discussed what I was finding with a variety of people, including professors and fellow graduate students, teachers at Stanton School, the school's counsellor, and a social worker and child abuse detective. These discussions were very useful in helping me understand some of my own biases and deal with what were sometimes painful emotions. As well, people in the school and community provided background information about the context, as well as background information about some of the children. Although much of the latter had to be kept off the record for my study, it did help me sort out what was accurate or at least plausible in some of the children's accounts of their lives.

I stopped visiting the classroom in June, when the school year ended. At this point I began what Denzin and Lincoln (1994) state is a two-way movement between constructing meaning of research documents and fieldnotes, and constructing meaning of the "working interpretative document that contains the writer's initial attempts to make sense of what he or she has learned" (p. 14). That is, notes and documents from the field and from the literature were used to inform the writing of rough drafts of this dissertation, but I also used the writing of these drafts to develop my understanding of what I had found in the field

and the academic literature. Thus, the development of the interpretation did not follow a linear course.

It was during this time that the decision was made to focus more specifically on Cathy, Elaine and Shannon for the dissertation. This decision was made for two main reasons. First, with these three girls I felt that sufficient rapport and understanding had developed to enable me to form strong interpretations of what they said and did. Secondly, these girls were very different from each other with respect to how they opposed their teacher, how they interacted with peers, and how they engaged in reading and writing. I felt that exploring these differences would provide an opportunity to understand variations on the nature of opposition in schools and its relationship to reading and writing. In other words, these three girls were selected because I felt that the combination would enhance the depth and breadth of my interpretation.

In order to analyze the interviews more specifically they were transcribed, and segments were coded in accordance with the topics of discussion, which included their relationships with me, family members, peers, and the teacher, the girls' perceptions of their futures, and their reading and writing. After segments of the transcripts were categorized in this way, I re-read them, marking points where themes of opposition and/or connection had appeared. Then, for each girl comparisons and contrasts were made with

respect to the patterns that seemed to re-appear in each category. Finally, comparisons and contrasts were made among the girls. I continued the process of interpreting the data after I began writing, since writing was a way of helping me think about what I had seen and heard.

It was what I found in the transcripts that helped me identify the information that would be most useful from field notes, interviews with the teacher, and the children's reading and writing samples. An exhaustive analysis was not made of these sources. Instead, I selected what I thought was most useful in building an understanding of the girls and their opposition in classroom-based reading and writing. Some of this information was used to provide a background for understanding the Language Arts program in this classroom and some of it was integrated with interview information to provide a better understanding of each girl.

## Summary

In summary, this was a qualitative study, in which I used an open-ended approach to learn about the issues related to reading and writing in a fifth grade inner-city classroom, and then developed a more specific focus on the opposition of three girls. Through observations, informal interviews, and drawing on a variety of informants, I developed an understanding of the classroom, school and community contexts, which informed my understanding of the girls and their opposition in the classroom. In the

following chapter, a description is provided of the classroom and the Language Arts program.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## THE CLASS

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a sketch of the classroom context for the children's learning of reading and writing. In this chapter I will provide an overview of the children's backgrounds and a description of their reading and writing program.

### The Children's Backgrounds

In the following discussion, "the class" refers to the seventeen students who were together in the afternoons for the regular grade five Language Arts and Mathematics program in Mrs. T.'s fifth grade classroom. In the mornings they had an additional seven classmates who had been identified as Special Needs children and attended the Special Needs class for Language Arts and Mathematics in the afternoons. The latter children did not participate in the study.

#### Socioeconomic Status

In this study no attempt was made to objectively categorize the children according to socioeconomic status. However, from my conversations with the children and the teacher it was clear that their socioeconomic status was generally low. They stated that their parents were either unemployed, employed in blue-collar jobs (for example, truck driver or cook), or attending college. None of the children reported having a parent who had attended university,

although one boy had an older sibling who was a student there.

Almost all of the children reported their parents having problems in the workplace. These problems included extended periods of unemployment, having to work two jobs to make ends meet, ongoing conflicts with a boss or co-worker, getting cheated out of pay or unemployment insurance, and problems obtaining social assistance. These reports were consistent with problems in the local economy, and they indicate the children's awareness of difficulties encountered by adults as they attempt to earn a livelihood.

Problems in the Home and Community

In my conversations with the children, they referred to social problems in the community, such as prostitution (the school yard was used by prostitutes after hours; during school hours they could be seen plying their trade only a few blocks from the school), crime (some of the children had their homes broken into), ongoing disputes with neighbours, and problems with landlords.

Problems which were reported to be occurring in the home included divorce or separations, ongoing conflicts between a parent and a partner, parental alcoholism, and custody disputes over the children. Three of the children in the class had been sexually or physically assaulted in cases which had been dealt with by authorities.

## Ethnicity and Peer Groups

Five of the eight boys and five of the nine girls in this class were Canadians of European backgrounds (Irish, Italian, Ukrainian, Dutch, and so on). These children were all born in Canada and most of them traced their ties to another country through their grandparents rather than their parents. The strength of ties to their ethnic communities varied from child to child but there were no indicators that for these children membership in one or another ethnic group resulted in conflicts for them.

Three additional children, all Canadian boys, were of Chinese, Vietnamese, or Chinese-Vietnamese ancestry. All of these boys had been born in Canada, but one of them spoke English as a second language. These three boys told me that they experienced conflicts between the norms and expectations in their families and those of their Euro-Canadian peers, and they explicitly linked these conflicts to cultural differences. However, they mixed a great deal with the other boys, and one of them was acknowledged by all to be the most popular boy in the class.

With the exception of a Cree boy who attended the class for only a short period of time, the four children in this class who identified themselves as Native were girls. Two of these girls, Tammy and Jolene, were Native by virtue of legal status and strong family ties at particular reserves. They told me that Native children in general are

identifiable by their appearance, family connections, and language. Both said they did not speak a Native language fluently but they did speak English with distinct dialects. Both girls were much quieter than most of the other children in this class and when I asked them about it, they linked their quietness to their Native culture.

The other two self-described Native girls were not accepted as "Native" by the first two, who said that these girls looked "white" and were too loud and talkative. However the four girls associated with each other in and outside of class. Outside of class, the four girls were members of a peer group that was called "streetwise" by the teacher. The children in this group were widely recognized as "tougher" and "cooler" than the other children. They wore make-up, smoked, hung around with older kids, and engaged in illicit activities such as stealing. Their school attendance was generally lower than that of the other children, and three of the girls were not enroled in the class for the full six months of the study.

The boys in this class formed a single social group in which individuals held various positions of popularity and power. By way of contrast, there were two very distinct social groups among the girls: the streetwise girls and the other girls, who played and associated with children their own age. There were no indications of conflicts between these two groups. Instead, there seemed to be a tacit

agreement that each peer group would go its own way, perhaps as a way of avoiding conflict.

### Behaviourial Problems Among the Children

On the basis of psychological assessments and reports by teachers, two of the boys in this class were formally identified as behaviour disordered. Both boys acted out in class, by engaging in behaviours such as crying loudly, shouting or screaming, throwing objects, and kicking over a desk. Outside of class they were frequently implicated in violent incidents.

There were frequent conflicts among the other children as well. Among the boys these conflicts were almost always related to power struggles in which one boy would attempt to use verbal insults or gestures (for example, acting as though he was going to hit another child) to display dominance over another. If the target of the display indicated that he accepted the boy's dominance then the event would be short lived. However, if the target tried to resist (by responding with another insult, for example) then the chain of verbal and non-verbal exchanges would be prolonged, and often several additional children would join in. Even when the power struggles were not blatant enough to draw the attention of the teacher, they caused a distraction for those who were near or in them, and often generated additional conflicts among the surrounding children.

The girls were also often involved in conflicts with

each other, and these conflicts occurred within each group, not between them. They were evident in the girls' whispering back and forth, writing of notes, silent withdrawal from group activities, and occasionally, shouting and/or tears. In contrast to the boys' conflicts these were almost always related to rivalry over who could be friends with whom, rather than who was more powerful. These conflicts will be discussed more fully in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, as will some of the conflicts that occurred between the boys and girls.

## The Teacher

Mrs. T. had seven years teaching experience prior to teaching this class. All of her prior experience had been in grades four to six and much of it had been with troubled children. She was a self-described perfectionist who often expressed feelings of guilt about not doing enough for the children in her class. She also spoke frequently about the tensions she experienced in her role with these children. The following is a set of paraphrased questions which she continually posed:

1. How do I reconcile my role as a classroom teacher with the children's needs for personal counselling?
2. How do I decide whose needs (particularly needs for personal attention) take precedence in this class at any particular moment?
3. What are the appropriate academic expectations for these

children? If I lower my expectations in accordance with their current level of achievement, is this not feeding into a kind of labelling process in which inner-city children are not perceived to be fully capable?

4. Should I adjust behaviourial expectations for those children who clearly have reasons for behaviourial difficulties?

5. How can I allow for talk, group interaction, and creative activities while at the same time retaining control over the children's behaviour?

6. How can I think about, and be sensitive to, some of the children's experiences (eg. sexual assault) while at the same time retaining enough of a grip on myself to manage the entire class? Has the need for the latter resulted in my becoming hardened?

7. Why does society blame teachers like me when the children are not successful? Am I a failure if my children do not progress enough?

Early in the study she indicated to me that in previous years (including ones in this particular school) she had always found teaching to be creative and fulfilling. In the current class, however, there were so many behaviourial problems that she had to become much more authoritarian than she wanted to be. She said that this took the joy out of her teaching.

## Organization of the Language Arts Class

### Seating Arrangements and Rules for Communication Prior to Spring Break

From January through April, the children sat in rows facing the front of the class, and the teacher exerted strong control over their communication. When she addressed the entire class she insisted on the children remaining silent and showing "listening skills," through keeping their bodies still and watching her. When there was a whole-class discussion, the children had to raise their hands and wait to be acknowledged before speaking.

When the children worked on their own, Mrs. T. allowed them freedom to choose where they would work (for example, some children would stretch out on the floor), but her explicit rule was that they were to work in silence by themselves. The tacit rule, which was a more consistent one, was that the children could communicate with each other as long as (1) they appeared to be doing their work or were children who usually completed their work, (2) only two children were involved (if a third child joined in a discussion, Mrs. T. would usually halt it), and (3) the children were quiet and appeared to be getting along with each other.

The general pattern was that when the children started working on their own, they would take more and more liberties with rules for communication until Mrs. T. felt

that too many children were off task, or a conflict had occurred or was about to occur among them. Then, she would call all interaction to a halt, and enforce the no-talking and work-by-yourself rules again. The children almost always responded favourably when she did this. Sometimes the class became so quiet and peaceful that the children continued working independently even after the bell rang for recess.

Mrs. T. told me that with previous classes she had always had the children seated in groups so that they could talk and work together, but with this class too many behaviourial problems arose when the children were allowed to interact with each other extensively. When I observed the class in the mornings, when they frequently worked in groups, most activities seemed to be unduly disrupted by conflicts among the children. By April, however, Mrs. T. felt the class had made progress in their "social skills," and she changed the afternoon seating arrangement so that they sat in groups of four.

<u>After Spring Break</u>

Initially the children told me that they did not like sitting in small groups because students were bothering each other, even though when I observed them it seemed that they were still following the previous expectations for quietness and independence in work. The reasons for their complaints became clearer over the next two weeks, as there was a rapid increase in overt peer interaction, and this led to an

escalation of behaviourial problems and conflicts which were compounded by the increasingly unpredictable classroom schedule (as in most schools, testing and special events frequently disrupted daily routines toward the end of the year), the arrival to the class of two particularly outgoing children, and Mrs. T.'s increasing tiredness. By May, tensions among the children and between them and Mrs. T. were much stronger than they were when I began my study.

## Provision of Instruction

### Whole-Class Instruction

On some days there was no whole-class instruction and the children proceeded to work on ongoing assignments after receiving a briefing from Mrs. T. about rules and expectations. On other days the Language Arts period began with a whole-class lesson either on "writing skills" or on creative writing.

#### Writing Skills

The writing skills lessons lasted about twenty minutes. In these lessons the teacher used a combination of explication, modelling, and questioning to teach the children rules governing the mechanics of writing (for example, punctuation), and then the children were told to apply and practice the rules on worksheet exercises. While they were working, she marked their work and provided individual assistance.

Creative Writing

When Mrs. T. taught creative writing lessons, she began them with a prewriting activity, such as a visualization exercise or reading a poem to the children, and then involved the children in a whole-class discussion to help them develop their ideas. The discussion usually lasted about fifteen minutes and then Mrs. T. directed the children to begin writing their first draft on their own. The onus was then on the children to contact Mrs. T. when they felt they were ready for feedback on their draft, and when she provided this feedback it was on their ideas as well as on the mechanics of writing. When each child felt he or she was ready, the child wrote a final draft and handed it in to the teacher. The creative writing was never marked. It was put on display on a bulletin board in the classroom or in the hallway, and then was placed in the children's writing folders.

Individualized Activities in Language Arts

Most of the Language Arts period was spent with the children working at their own paces through series of assignments which included the preceding ones as well as those which are outlined below.

Novel Study

The class began their novel studies before I arrived and so I did not observe the instruction Mrs. T. provided. However, she said that she worked through one novel with

them as she read it aloud and discussed with them how they might "react." As a guide, she used a photocopied list of questions which included, "What do you think will happen next?" and "How are some of the characters like the people you know?" Following this, she allowed the children to make choices from seven novels she provided, including Owls in the Family (Mowat, 1970), and Here She is, Miss Teeny Wonderful (Godfrey, 1984). The children were to read one chapter at a time and then record a brief summary in their response journals, as well as their reaction to the chapter.

In January, when the study began, the children were working through this process at their own paces. Mrs. T. provided oral and written feedback on an individual basis. Sometimes this feedback focused on the meaning, sometimes on the mechanics of writing, and sometimes on a combination of the two.

After Spring Break, when the children each had completed one novel, they repeated this process with books related to the theme of "Food, Glorious Food." These books included Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (Dahl, 1973), The Chocolate Touch (Catling, 1981), and The Celery Stalks at Midnight (Howe, 1983). This time, the children had a broader range of selections to choose from and were more independent in their choices. As well, they were to write their reactions at three points during the reading, rather than at the end of every chapter.

Reading and Writing Centres

There was always a learning centre at the back of the classroom, with the topic changing every few months. When I first visited the classroom, prior to Christmas, it was "Holidays Around the World." When the study began it was "Dinosaurs," and after Spring Break it became "Food Glorious Food." Each centre had a backdrop of a colourful bulletin board display, as well as a collection of books related to the theme. The centre itself consisted of sets of readings and activity cards which Mrs. T. had collected and/or made over the years. There was a great deal of variety among the activities. They included (1) Read a passage and answer the comprehension questions, (2) Sequence a set of sentences or pictures, (3) Use the books at the centre to write a report, (4) Conduct a survey among your classmates, and (5) Use the provided ideas to develop a story.

The general procedure was that the children would go to the back of the room to select readings and activities, and then either return to their desks or work on the floor or a table near the centre. Some of the activities were compulsory and others were optional; in both cases the children could determine the order in which they would carry them out. Each child worked through the activities at his or her own pace, and kept a booklet with completed assignments which were marked by the teacher. As with the novel study, Mrs. T. provided individual feedback orally and in writing.

Provision of Individual Assistance

The class activities appeared to have been designed so that the children would spend most of their time working through activities at their own paces and Mrs. T. could provide them with individualized instruction while they did so. In practice, this is not how it worked out, and most of the children did not have access to her assistance on a regular basis. One reason was that Mrs. T. frequently had to spend time with individuals who were experiencing extreme emotional or behaviourial problems. A second reason was the need for Mrs. T. to spend extra time with children who had missed school because of absence, lateness, or being called down to the office. A third reason was that when Mrs. T. was working with an individual she would often be distracted by children in another part of the room or by interruptions at the door or on the intercom. Examples of these interruptions included a parent's arrival at the door, being called down to the office to meet with a consultant, and having to consult with other staff about incidents which had occurred on the playground.

Because of the unpredictability of events, Mrs. T. told me that she found it impossible to create and follow a schedule for providing individual assistance to the children. Instead, the onus was on the children to bid for attention when they wanted help. On some days, she remained in her desk and when the children wanted help they lined up

and waited for it. On other days, the children were instructed to raise their hands if they wanted assistance and wait until she came to them. Neither of these procedures was successful for most of the children, and many of them resorted to getting attention by calling out to the teacher and/or interrupting the work that she was doing with someone else. Other children obtained help from their friends or simply gave up and did the best they could without her assistance.

## Other Reading and Writing Activities

In this class there were several additional reading and writing activities which took place outside of the Language Arts period. The following are some of the activities.

### Reading Aloud to Children

Mrs. T. read to the class for at least fifteen minutes every day, and this took place in the morning so that the Special Needs children could participate. This activity took place at the back of the room, where the children could sit or lie down on the carpet in a variety of positions. Mrs. T. read at a rapid pace with strong expression, occasionally stopping to ask the children, "What does this word mean?" or "What do you think will happen next?" The children's responses to these questions, as well as their occasional exclamations and laughter indicated that most of the children were listening attentively. As well, some of the children would follow along in their own copies of the text.

Titles of books which she completed over the six months included Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing (Blume, 1987), Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (Dahl, 1973), and The Hobbit (Tolkein, 1984).

Journal Writing

This activity also took place in the morning. Mrs. T. said that originally she had the children write in journals daily but it was too difficult to respond to them all, so she reduced it to three times weekly. When I observed the class during journal writing time, it was evident that multiple purposes were being conveyed to the children. For example, Mrs. T. sometimes referred to the journal as a personal diary in which the children could write for themselves, but in her oral instructions and written feedback she also frequently stressed the need for good handwriting and proofreading.

As time went on, her reading of the journals became more and more sporadic, as did her setting aside time for the children's journal writing. There were two main reasons for this. First, Mrs. T. was extremely busy with other school-related matters throughout the school day and often into the evenings as well, and so it was difficult for her to keep up her reading of the variety of assignments that the children completed every day. Secondly, because of constraints in the school schedule, there were relatively few times when she could have the whole class together and

when she had this time she often used it to provide additional continuity to work (usually group projects) which the children were carrying out in Social Studies or Science.

For several weeks Mrs. T. and I agreed that if I took over the task of responding to the journals this might assist Mrs. T. with her work load, provide the children with more consistent feedback, and at the same time possibly provide an additional avenue for me to communicate with the children. However, it was difficult to maintain continuity in this process because Mrs. T. still found it difficult to set aside whole-class times for journal writing. As well, I became concerned that some of the children were missing one of the few avenues some of them had for confiding in the teacher. Thus, Mrs. T. took over responding to the journals again, but by the end of April the children were no longer writing in their journals.

Home Reading Program

Mrs. T. started this program after Spring Break. As with her practice of reading aloud, the main purpose was to ensure that the children became more actively involved in books, but in the home reading program the emphasis was on reading done outside of the school. The children were given free choice as to what they would read and most of them drew on the collection in the school library. The children were to read three times weekly at home. Each time they read, they had to record the title, author, and their reaction to

what they read. Mrs. T. instructed them that this was to ensure that they actually read the book.

Rules for ensuring assignments were complete were consistent with the school's policy for homework. For the first assignment missed, the child had to stay in at recess and/or lunch hour and finish it; the second time, a note would be sent home; if the child missed a third time in a row, he or she received an in-school suspension and had to spend a day working independently in a cubicle in the office.

Learning Logs

Every Friday morning the class brainstormed and discussed the week's events, and Mrs. T. recorded the events on the board as the children talked about them. Each child then proceeded to write entries in his or her learning log. This was a set of sheets which contained sentences to be completed, such as "I enjoyed learning...." The logs were then taken home to be signed by the child's parent or guardian, and returned on Monday.

## Summary

In this study it is not assumed that there is a fixed distinction between inner-city schools and those in other areas. However, in this classroom and school there seemed to be many children dealing with social problems that are common in inner-city districts, according to accounts given to Maynes (1990) by principals in what he called urban poor

schools. In turn, the teacher in this classroom had to deal with children who had a variety of behaviourial and emotional problems, and she had found it difficult to meet all their needs.

By her own account, Mrs. T. found it difficult to find a balance between providing control over the children's learning and behaviour, and allowing them the freedom which she recognized was important to enhance their involvement in reading and writing. Her attempts to find this balance resulted in two very different structures for the learning environment prior to April and after it, and it resulted in her providing a variety of activities that ranged from the highly structured (for example, writing skills) to those which the students could shape in their own ways (for example, creative writing). In general, the main problem was that so many of the children had extreme needs that she could not provide them with consistent and predictable opportunities to receive social support for their reading and writing.

The purpose of the following three chapters is to provide portraits of the three girls who were selected for in-depth consideration in this study. Chapter Five is about Cathy, who was almost always cooperative with her teacher and who rarely opposed her in overt ways. Chapter Six will be about Elaine, whose thinking and behaviour was constantly shifting between the compliant and the oppositional. Chapter

Seven will be about Shannon who, among the three girls, indicated the most defiance toward her teacher but also the greatest need and desire to connect with her.

For each girl I will provide an overview of what our conversations and relationship were like. Then I will describe each girls' relationships with her family, peers, and teacher, her views of her future, and her reading and writing in the classroom. An integrated discussion of the findings will be presented in Chapter Eight.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## CATHY

### Talking With Cathy

Prior to our first private conversation it was evident that Cathy was looking forward to the experience because she had already approached me more than once in order to talk. The first time she approached me, it was with the question, "Have you ever had your teeth cleaned?" which provided an opening for her to talk about an experience which was going to confront her the next day. The second time she asked me for permission to include me in a story she was writing. It was called "Blast From The Past," and my role in this story was perhaps a reflection of how Cathy anticipated our relationship would be. She wrote that she and I had an adventure with dinosaurs and I saved her from their attack. Then I took her to her home, and we had a tacit agreement that neither of us would reveal to anyone else what had happened. At the end of the story, Cathy concluded, "Only Carol and I know the truth."

During our first conversation it was evident that she recognized that she was a research participant. When I reviewed the purpose of the study to her she exclaimed "So we're doing research!" She also spontaneously observed, in her typically thoughtful way, that I needed to ask her questions because when I watched the children in class, "you don't know what we're thinking."

Her desire to talk to me, however, rested less on the idea of participating in my study, and more on the fact that it provided her with an opportunity to converse with a friendly adult. As will be discussed more fully later on, she often talked about her personal affairs and concerns with her teacher and her parents. She found these discussions very fruitful, and it is likely because of them that she used my study as an additional opportunity to share and explore some of her experiences. At the end of the study she wrote me a note which said, "Thank you for giving me a chance to talk."

Cathy was willing to confide in me from the beginning of the study to the end. There were only a few occasions when she would say things like, "I shouldn't be telling you this. I'm not really allowed," or "Don't tell [another girl] I told you this...." However, when this occurred she would proceed to provide the information as if she were assuming that I could be trusted with it. I usually had no reason to believe that what she said was anything other than what she believed to be true at the moment, and that most of it was literally true. The latter was particularly apparent when she told me about classroom events, in which her high degree of accuracy in reporting what happened was confirmed by my own observations and/or accounts by others.

However there was an important feature in Cathy's talk which I needed to take into account when interpreting what

she said. This was her tendency to qualify and soften her statements in such a way as to retain a veneer of "niceness" with respect to her attitudes and behaviour. For example, when speaking about a friend she said, "I'm not trying to say anything bad, but she always...," and when speaking about a boy she stated, "I'm not saying he's bad. I'm just saying he talks a lot." The following is a third example, where Cathy initially obscured some of her negative behaviour, but then admitted to it with some prompting:

> Cathy: I wasn't bad but the teacher thought I was.
>
> Carol: What did you do?
>
> Cathy: [Laughing] Nothing.
>
> Carol: Oh come on. You must have done something.
>
> Cathy: Well, we were playing musical chairs on the bus....

Over time, I learned to anticipate areas where Cathy might be obscuring her role in events and to ask her questions to make this role explicit. In the following example, she was explaining how she played an active role in perpetuating conflicts with her friends:

> Carol: You've said some mean things to Penny, haven't you? Can you give me an example of some things you've said to her in the past?
>
> Cathy: I called her dad a "drunkie"....I called her some swears.
>
> Carol: Can you give me an example? I'm not going

to judge you for saying it but I want to get it on the tape.

Cathy: Oh I called her "a bitch." An "asshole." And "shitface."

## Cathy and Her Family

Cathy was a Euro-Canadian girl of Dutch and German ancestry. Her parents had divorced when she was four years old. Following the divorce she moved with her mother and older brother from a working-class neighbourhood to an inner-city location which she described as "the worst place in the world to live." She told me that her mother subsequently remarried, and Cathy was currently living with her mother, stepfather, and older brother in a neighbourhood not far from Stanton School. She also stayed with her father and his parents every second weekend. There were no points in our discussions where she gave an indication that she thought her family situation was going to change.

### Protection, Discipline, and Caring

Cathy said that her family was more protective of her than were the parents of many of her friends. For example when she was been bullied in her previous school her brother tried to intervene, her mother tried to get school authorities to do something about it, and then finally her stepfather drove to the school and threatened to beat the bullies up. This stopped the conflict. In the current year her grandparents were babysitting her in the morning before

she went to school. After school her brother dutifully (and, usually, cheerfully) arrived at the classroom door everyday to walk her home. One day when Cathy did not come home on time both her father and her stepfather came to the school to look for her! Sometimes Cathy spoke about this protectiveness as if it were embarrassing, but often she spoke about it as if it were a point of pride for her, as when she talked about her stepfather threatening the bullies. There was also pride in her voice when she told me how, when her friend Penny was harassing her, her mother phoned Penny and told her to leave "my poor baby" alone.

Cathy's family was also more strict than many of the others which she knew. If she did not keep up in her school work they quickly applied sanctions, which included her having to miss her dance lessons in order to catch up on her work. As well, when she came home late one evening from riding her bike she was grounded and could not go to a neighbourhood dance for pre-teens. She said this strictness made her life "sometimes kind of boring," and sometimes it made her angry. For example when she could not go to the preteen dance she said she was "really mad" at her mother and then she wrote in her journal that she wished Ashley's mother could be her mother instead.

For the most part, however, she interpreted this discipline as a sign that her parents cared for her. She said the following after I had asked her what the children

in her class think when they see another child fight:

> We think, "Oh, his mother probably doesn't take care of him." You know, cause we saw someone. We went to Dairy Queen last night. And we were sitting by these girls and they were always laughing and everything. And you know what they said? They said, "I'm going up to the cashier and say, 'Today's my birthday,' and get a free sundae." And their mom thought it was funny! And you know what [her stepfather] said when he got to the car? He said, "Cathy, if you ever act like that in public I'll whip your butt so hard that you won't even know what hit you." I go [laughing], "Don't worry! I won't!"

## Conflict and Talk

Cathy's family was not without conflict. For her these conflicts were an inevitable part of life, and talk was an important means for dealing with them. She described herself as being "really depressed" when her parents divorced, and she said that she "wouldn't talk to anybody" because she was angry at her parents and her stepfather. But then she was eventually able to talk to them about the divorce and she said this talk made her feel better. It was likely this kind of talk that enabled her to think about, and resolve, conflicts in the family context. For example, a particular problem following the divorce was that her father kept

"telling me stories" about her stepfather being responsible for the marriage breakdown. Cathy did not believe her father's stories. She attributed these stories to his being "kinda lonely," and she stated that this problem would be resolved if her father remarried. Her way of making meaning of this dilemma allowed her to think about it in such a way that she could maintain relations with all three of her parents, rather than being swept up in a conflict of loyalty between her father and her stepfather.

That talk was frequent between Cathy and her parents was evident in the way that she quoted them extensively when we talked about school events, as well as life in general. Many of her comments began with "My mom says," or "My dad told me...." Even when she reported yelling, crying, or in other ways showing anger at her parents, the general pattern in her accounts was that to remain silent with her parents was to show anger, but to talk was a way of resolving conflicts. In the following example she was telling me about the time when her mother cancelled the family's subscription to cable television:

> I was really mad. I was crying. Cause my mom just said, "Bang! Oh, our cable's gone." I'm like, "Excuse me?" Cause I was really mad. I didn't talk to her for a week. She's like, "I didn't think it's important." "Mom, do you know how important this is to me? Cause, I mean, TV's my life!"

It is presumably through talking about this with her mother that a compromise solution was reached. Cathy agreed with her mother that if she was so addicted to TV, then perhaps it was better to learn to live without depending on it. Besides, "Grandma's gonna tape my TV shows."

This is not to say that Cathy was able to talk about everything at home. She was acutely aware that what she said could hurt her parents at times. She said that she had laughed at her father when she found out that he had worked at a Mcdonalds restaurant, and she said he had cried when she did this. As well, she said that she could not talk openly with her mother about "money and all" because "she'll yell at me." However, she also said that when she could not talk to her mother about things like this, she could talk about them to her father. In this way she likely had access to alternate versions of events and possible meanings for them. The following indicates her ability to question the meanings which her parents shared with her:

> My dad's always saying girls are more sensitive than boys. Like, I don't understand that. I mean, a girl could be really tough and everything. And a boy could be really sensitive. And so I don't know why he says that girls cry more.

## Schooling and the Future

Cathy's view of her own future was clearly related to discussions she had with her parents. As was noted previously, when she fell behind in her work at school her parents quickly applied sanctions. She also mentioned her parents helping her when she could not understand her math homework. It was evident that they had talked about the purpose of this school learning to her. She said, "My mom does math at work all day." Another time she quoted her mother as saying, "Oh, you're never going to get a job with spelling like this!"

This view was consistent with Cathy's faith in the work ethic. When I asked her why some people are rich and others are poor she replied:

> Well, some people, they don't feel like earning their money. They just sit back and let everyone else do it. And they're poor. They don't know how to do anything. They, like, they don't want to work for their money. But other people, they work for their money and they get it. They try and try and try, and even at their baddest stages they keep on working. They keep on trying and still--so they get their money. So I think that's what makes the difference.

Based on her accounts, her parents had to work hard to make ends meet. Her mother had dropped out of college and

her father and stepfather had not completed high school, although the latter was currently studying to learn a trade. Cathy consistently blamed their lack of education for problems they had or were currently having in the work place. These included the following: being laid off from a job, having to beg in order to get a job, working night shifts, doing difficult and dirty labour, working in demeaning jobs, and being harassed by the boss.

She thought that these would not happen to her. She used the metaphor of "going up the steps" to describe her future completion of high school, college, and then university. Then she said about her parents' goals for her:

> They want me to go to university. Cause college is one step lower than university. That's what they say.

Although she thought this process was "gonna kill me," she believed it was essential for a "good life," and explained to me what this meant:

> A good life is where you have no problems, which is hardly ever. But you have hardly ever problems. You go to work regularly.... A good life is where you can choose your opportunities. I mean some people, they can't. They're just stuck with one opportunity cause they don't have a good education.

## Cathy and Her Peers

### Female Friends

Cathy was a cheerful girl who seemed to be able to get along with almost everyone in her class. Paradoxically, the two exceptions to this were her best friends, Penny and Ashley. Cathy could not quite understand why she quarrelled so much with them:

> You just, like, I don't know....I mean everybody's got to get into fights. I mean, everybody's got to get into a fight, sometime. And then you just--I don't know. It just happens.

Cathy, Penny, and Ashley formed a triad. They socialized with each other as much as they could in class and outside of the class as well. However, conflicts among them were frequent, and these conflicts often drew attention away from their lessons. In class, when they were allowed to socialize, I often saw them whispering to each other, writing notes, and sometimes crying and/or withdrawing from activities when they were angry at each other.

Central to these conflicts was the idea that one could be friends with only one girl at a time. Cathy gave me an example of this when she told me about the time when Penny was in the hospital getting her tonsils out. While Penny was gone, she got along well with Ashley but when Penny returned:

> It's because of her we fight. Because, like, she's

> our best friend. And we both want her to be our best friend. Not somebody else's. Our best friend. That's how I feel. And I think that's how Ashley feels too.

But Penny could not be best friends with both girls. She would have to choose one over the other. If she chose to be friends with Cathy, then Ashley would be excluded and vice versa. In either case the excluded girl would show her hurt and anger. Then, one of the other two girls would try to be her friend again. This would result in the exclusion of the other girl and the whole process would begin anew. Ashley referred to this process as "making up and breaking up." It meant that if Cathy wished to be friends with one of these girls she had to be willing to engage in conflict with the other:

> I try to be both of their friends. But then one time I played with Penny instead of Ashley. Right? And Ashley and Penny were in a fight. And I go, "Ashley, how are you feeling?" And she goes, "Why do you want to know? You don't like me anyway." And I'm like, "I like you."

In contrast to Cathy, both Ashley and Penny were often openly rebellious against their teacher and against boys. Sometimes they yelled, cried, or talked back in ways that seemed out of proportion to what was going on. Some of what Cathy said indicated that they were also very irrational

when dealing with her. In contrast to the relationships she had with adults, Cathy's relationships with female friends were ones in which she could not use talk to resolve conflicts.

One day I watched Cathy and Ashley whisper back and forth while they sat together in the class. When I later asked Cathy about this, she said they had been arguing because earlier in the year they had traded desks and now Ashley wanted hers back again:

> And yesterday she wanted her desk all of a sudden. And she was like, "Aaagh! I want my desk back!" And she put everything into a little bag. And I'm like, "Ashley, you're doing this for nothing. I don't want to trade desks back." And she's like, "Oh, fine, then! I just have to stay here and all. And okay, I'll give you all these reasons. This desk is too small for me....

In fact, as Cathy pointed out, the two desks were almost exactly alike. They argued for about fifteen minutes before Cathy gave in:

> But finally I just said to trade desks. Cause I really didn't want to get into a fight. I was too tired.

She told me about another time when she was visiting Ashley's home and they decided to go bike riding. Ashley had two bikes and asked Cathy to pick one. But after Cathy

picked one, Ashley said she wanted the same bike. They argued about this. Then Cathy said Ashley could take the first bike and she would take the second. However:

> And [Ashley] goes, "Fine. No, you take it. Fine. Everything has to be your way." And I'm like, "Ashley, calm down." Like, she's Mood Swing Mania.

Cathy recognized that the issues in these quarrels were not the bike nor the desk. Instead, they were related to Ashley's need to "get her way," particularly when she was in a bad mood. Cathy told the following story to illustrate how Penny was difficult to reason with, too. This story is consistent with what I knew of Penny in the classroom:

> We were playing with a ball. And she kept on bouncing the ball up and down when me and Ashley were trying to talk. Right? And it kept on landing between us, you know? And we were, like, "Penny, quit it." It's annoying, right? And she's like, "Fine. You know the rules. I can't do anything. Fine. I won't even touch the ball." And she just drops the ball and stands there. That's all she does and then--and then I go, "Oh, Penny. You always do stuff like this....You're so stupid."I said that. And then she goes, "Ooooh," and starts running after me....

At first I found it puzzling that Cathy remained friends with these girls because even though they did have

fun together and they talked together about topics such as sex and divorce, they seemed to spend most of their time together quarrelling. However, for Cathy there were few alternatives for friendship in this class. The streetwise girls were out of her league in terms of the kinds of activities which they engaged in, and the other two girls formed friendships with girls who did not attend this school. Cathy was likely frightened that if she lost her friendships with Penny and Ashley she would end up alone.

The teacher found it difficult enough to reason with Ashley and Penny as individuals, let alone deal with the conflicts that they had with each other and with Cathy, so she became involved in the girls' problems only when it was necessary to restore order to the class and to get the girls back on task. Because of this, there was no long-term work with the girls to help them understand their conflicts and resolve them. Without adult support for handling these interactions, Cathy resorted to using the same tactics against Ashley and Penny that they used against her.

One tactic was what the children in this class called "burning" (i.e., rendering an insult that causes one's opponent to lose control or at least become speechless). The exchange of burns was always a public event in which many children would get involved by watching, listening, and egging the participants on. Cathy cited as "a great burn" a comment made by Ashley after Cathy told Penny to "go fuck

your brother, like you always do." Penny replied to Cathy, "Oh shut up, you little grade oner." At this point Ashley turned to Cathy and said, "Oh, you're a grade oner? You're smarter than Shelley!" Shelley was a fourth grade girl who was attending the fifth grade class for math. The meaning was that if Cathy was a grade oner, she was smart enough to be promoted four years ahead of her grade level and thus smarter than all the other children in the class. This was truly a great burn because instead of just adding an insult to the fray, Ashley had turned Penny's insult into a compliment. Penny was stumped. She said sarcastically to Ashley, "Thank you very much, ex-best friend." Ashley replied, "You're welcome."

The process of burning was contagious. If you were listening, it was easy to blurt out a burn without thinking. Even the teacher did this once, which greatly surprised all of us, including her. However, the tacit rule was that once you made a smart comment, you were an open target for burns from the other children, who might get you back with something meaner than what you said. Because of this, some of the children steered clear of the process altogether.

Cathy was one of the few who seemed to be able to get close enough to be involved in it, while at the same time resist being swept up in the process completely. The following is an illustration. Cathy was telling me how Scott had teased Penny when she was burned by Ashley:

What a burn! Burn her back! Come on. Come on. Burn her back....Oh can't think of one? Oh poor baby!

Because of this blatant provocation, Scott was disciplined by the teacher. When this happened, the girls started to laugh. Penny turned to Cathy and said he was being disciplined for interfering with "other people's right to fight." This was a play on the teacher's frequent reference to people's right to be heard in this classroom. I found it hard to stop laughing when Cathy told me this, and she said that her mother had thought it was very funny, too. At any rate, Penny, Cathy, and Ashley became friends again. Penny's comment had turned the tables on Scott.

The other tactic, which in this class was used only by girls, involved the dredging up of hurtful and personal confidences to hurt one's friend (or enemy, depending on how you looked at it). Cathy told me about this when we were talking about burns, and she told me that the worst burns were ones which implied sex with one's mother. I asked her:

Carol: Is there anything meaner and grosser than [burns about] sex with your mother?

Cathy: Well, sometimes. When me and Penny got into a fight. Sometimes she talks about my bunny. She died. And she knows it really, really bothers me when people talk about that. So that's why she does it.

Carol: What would be an example of something she'd

say?

Cathy: Well, it was my fault my bunny died. I didn't clean the cage enough. And she says, "Well, at least I didn't kill my own bunny!"

Carol: That's mean, isn't it?

Cathy: Yeah. And you know what I always do? I always go home crying when she does that to me.

Cathy could be equally mean when insulting her friends. One day when she was angry at Penny she yelled at her, "At least my dad isn't a drunkie!" This was something about which Penny was extremely sensitive. The other children were quick to tease her about her father, and when they did this, she cried. I asked Cathy how she felt when she insulted Penny about her father:

It felt kind of good. But then, after, I felt bad. I started to regret it [because] a little while ago she told me that and I used it against her.

Boys

Although Cathy was often involved in conflicts with her friends, she usually avoided conflicts with boys. I did not see her engaged in overt conflicts with them in class nor did I hear about such engagement in the interviews. When I asked her if she ever got into conflicts with boys on the playground she replied that she and her friends just stayed away from them:

Cathy: Because we know that if we even go close to

them they'll bother us so we just say--well, instead of going through all the trouble of getting. Like hurting their feelings or anything. Just stay away.

Carol: Of hurting whose feelings?

Cathy: Like them hurting our feelings. Or us saying bad things to them.

As a result of avoiding conflicts with boys, she was well-liked by them and they never teased her nor harassed her. In fact, one of them told me that she was the only girl he liked because she knew "how to keep her mouth shut." Given that she was actually quite talkative, the meaning of this statement was that she was able to keep her mouth shut when what she said might offend or embarrass a boy. In order to understand why this was so important for these children, it is important to remember that the boys were continually engaged in verbal and non-verbal struggles whose outcome determined their status in the classroom. If a boy lost in a struggle with a girl, then this greatly diminished his status and if he wanted to restore it, he had to persist in the conflict with the girl until it was clear that he had won it. Thus, the boys in general were resentful of girls who did not give in easily to them when harsh words were exchanged.

It is also important to note that all the girls in this class told me that it was already important for them to have

a boyfriend or that it would soon be important for them. Like the other girls in her peer group, Cathy thought that the most dominant boy in this class was the one who would make the best boyfriend. At first, when I asked her why he would be a good boyfriend, she said the following:

> Well, he's kind of sweet, you know. He's cute. He's funny. Makes girls laugh. And I don't know. He's--he's nice. Like, and he's kind of a loudmouth but he's nice.

But then, when I asked her to give me an example of his being nice, she specified:

> He gives stuff to you and he's really--when people are bothering me. Like, if you're going out with him, he'll tell them not to bother you.

This was consistent with what I knew of him. In fact he often told the children not to bother the teacher, and he tended to support Mrs. T. when the children were acting up. Although the children complained to me about him, they usually did what he told them to. One day, I overheard him telling Ashley, "If you want to be popular, you've got to learn to shut up," after she argued with him during a group activity. Cathy did not need to be told this. When I asked her if she argued with boys, she said that she did not:

> It's kind of hard and they'd kind of just say, "Shut up." They'd probably just say, "Shut up." It's hard.

## Cathy and Her Teacher

Throughout the study Cathy consistently referred to her teacher as "nice," "fair," "understanding," and "the best teacher I've had actually." Her positive attitude toward her teacher was most striking when we were discussing moments when the teacher "lost it" with the class. Cathy was among the children who felt that the class was responsible for the teacher losing her temper. She said, "We're a bad class. We're always doing bad things," and "I feel so sorry for her." If she were the teacher, "I'd try to control myself," but when the teacher lost her temper in one incident, Cathy spoke about her in a forgiving manner, saying, "No big deal. I mean, she was sorry. She said she was sorry." In June, when I asked her how she felt about another incident in which the teacher lost her temper, she said, "I know that teachers lose it. I know that happens....Mrs. T. needs a holiday, I can tell."

Cathy's way of making meaning of her teacher's temper was similar to her way of making meaning of family conflicts. In both contexts she interpreted her relationships with adults as being characterized by caring. This interpretation facilitated, and was facilitated by, her ability to explain the adult's behaviour in ways that allowed her to forgive and accept the behaviour.

Cathy's behaviour was consistent with this. In class, she was always cheerful, compliant, and patient in her

dealings with Mrs. T. During whole-class lessons and discussions she appeared to be attending to every word. She would occasionally raise her hand to ask a question or give an answer but this was without the same kind of urgency that some of the other children showed when they wished to contribute or have the floor. If her bid for attention was ignored, she would simply lower her hand and return to listening again. A similar pattern was evident when the children were engaged in independent work and some of them would be vying for the teacher's attention. She rarely approached the teacher, was often ignored when she did so, and never showed overt signs of disappointment or anger when this happened.

When I asked Cathy if she thought Mrs. T. gave more attention to some children than to others she replied that Mrs. T. gave it to "the ones that need it." She specified that this included the Special Needs children and those with poor attendance. She said that in her allocation of attention the teacher treated the children "very fairly." To support this idea she quoted Mrs. T. as saying:

> Being fair is not giving everyone the same things.
>
> Being fair is giving everyone what they need.

In another conversation she repeated this view:

> Carol: Who do you think she pays more attention to?
>
> Cathy: People who need more help. I think, cause

people who are just hunky dory with everything, she doesn't have to spend that much time. Cause they know everything and they're okay.

Compared to the other children in the class, Cathy did have less urgent needs for her academic work. She was a bright girl who was able to understand the lessons and complete them with minimal assistance. As well, she was confident that if she really needed her teacher's help, she would get it. For example, she said that the teacher had stayed with her after school to help her with her math.

She also felt that her teacher would be both available and understanding if Cathy wanted to talk to her about personal matters. In September she had used her journal to tell her teacher that her parents were divorced. After the teacher read this, she took Cathy aside privately and told her that her parents had been divorced too. This meant a great deal to the girl and she said that she still talked to her about it at times. In turn, the teacher told me that she enjoyed the private conversations which she had with Cathy, and it was not difficult for me to see why this would be so. Cathy was good humoured and witty. Her talk was both adult-like and child-like in such a way that you were never quite sure what kinds of insights she would come up with next. In turn, when you said something to her, you could tell that she was thinking it over very carefully.

Cathy told me that she was not able to talk to Mrs. T.

as much as she would like to, but she expressed confidence that the teacher would set aside time to talk to her if she was strategic in how she approached her. Thus, she said that if she wanted to have a chitchat with Mrs. T. she watched her and approached her only "if she's smiling and if she's happy." Moreover, she said that when she needed advice about a serous matter, she would say, "Mrs. T.," in a "serious, kind of quiet, lonely voice."

Between Cathy and Mrs. T. there seemed to be a tacit agreement that if Cathy met minimal requirements for work completion and if she did not cause problems for classroom management, then she could have more freedom in the classroom than was allowed for many of the other children. When Cathy was working on an individual assignment she always started out as if she knew what to do and was going to do it. But then she would sometimes stop to engage in gossip, joke around, and chitchat with those who sat around her, or to watch others and/or daydream. She was always very quiet when she was off-task, and when the teacher's attention was drawn to her part of the room, Cathy would quickly cast her eyes down to her work as if she had been engaged in it all along. Even though the teacher often knew that Cathy had not been engaged in her work, Cathy's gesture signalled an immediate compliance which made it unnecessary for Mrs. T. to chastise her. Moreover, when the teacher checked her work and found it incomplete, she would scold

Cathy and threaten to contact her mother, and this almost always resulted in Cathy's rushing to complete the task that had been assigned.

During the six months of my study, there was only one instance in which Cathy engaged in overt rebellion against her teacher's agenda. I became aware of this when I read the following, which was very unusual for her, in her journal:

> Dear Mrs. T.
>
> I don't like the reading program that you have made up because not that I hate reading it's just that you have us reading all the time and we have to have a life too like say I went out for super and I was busy the rest of the weak and I had to stay in. I don't think it's very fare.

At this point I was the one who was reading the journals so I wrote to Cathy that I would show what she said to the teacher. The teacher did not respond in writing to Cathy's complaint but she did meet with Cathy to remind her of the importance of reading. Cathy then took her opposition one step further by simply refusing to continue writing responses to what she had read at home. When I asked her about this, she clearly identified the issue as a struggle for control over her private time:

> [The novel study] was boring and now she makes another thing just like it for this home reading program. I mean, let us do what we want at home.

> That's what I think about this home reading program. It's just, like, when we go home we can read if we want to, okay? Don't have to read [because] you say so. Cause when we go home it's not her life. It's ours. She can't control it. And that's what she's trying to do. Control our life. Cause I stay up almost all the night reading and trying to do that stupid report. All night. Since I got home I read, ate supper. I read and then from 8:30 to 10:00 I was writing.

She also identified the problem as an issue of control over the purpose for reading:

> I hate [the home reading program]. I can't read and write. I mean, if you read a book you have fun with it. You don't write. If you read a book and have to write all about it and write your feelings. And I just told you [earlier in the conversation] I can't do that....I read for recreation. Not to write about it.

This refusal was out of character for Cathy, because she had always seemed to be willing and able to cooperate with the teacher. It was also out of character because Cathy had always shown good judgement and sensitivity with respect to when and how to stretch the teacher's limits. She tried to oppose the home reading program even though she recognized that resistance was futile, because the teacher's

terms for this program were non-negotiable:

Carol: I don't understand. You're going to have to do it.

Cathy: But I don't want to.

Carol: Is there any way you can get out of it?

Cathy: No.

Another observation which makes this opposition very striking is that none of the other children in the class opposed the home reading program the way that Cathy did, and in fact they all told me they thought it was a good idea. Those children who were not reading at home felt that the home reading program provided the extra incentive for them to get involved in an activity which they usually enjoyed once they got started. Those children who were reading regularly at home told me that it was not a big deal to spend a short time writing about what they had read and so it did not affect what they were doing on their own anyway.

Because of the response of her mother and the other children, Cathy did not gain any support for her opposition to this activity. When Mrs. T. was filling out a form to be sent home to Cathy's mother to inform her of her daughter's lack of homework completion, Cathy started tearfully pleading with her to give her one more chance to complete the home reading program. She promised that if she were given this chance, she would live up to all the expectance for completing the assignment. At first, Mrs. T. was not

going to give her this chance because she had not given it to any of the other children. However, Cathy was upset and had obviously turned over a new leaf. Therefore her teacher sighed, rolled her eyes, and agreed to let Cathy try again.

In this class, when so many of the children had more pressing problems, dealing with Cathy's relatively minor transgressions was not a priority for Mrs. T. In turn, Cathy recognized that her needs were not a priority in this class. She not only accepted this situation, but recognized that if she signalled this acceptance to the teacher, then she could have space within which she could pursue some of her own interests instead of devoting undue energy to work that had been authorized by the teacher.

Summary of Compliance and Opposition

Cathy's behaviour in this class almost always demonstrated acceptance of her teacher's authority, and the reasons for this acceptance seemed to be rooted in relationships which she had with adults in her family, where she associated the exercise of authority with caring and protection for her, where she had developed a concrete understanding of schooling as being beneficial for her future, where parents actively supported the teacher's efforts, and where she had learned to talk through conflicts and understand other people's perspectives. In this context, Cathy would have had little to gain by opposing her teacher's authority because such opposition would threaten

the relationships she had in the home as well as the relationship with her teacher, which she felt was a beneficial one. Thus, in the six months of this study, there was only one occasion when Cathy attempted to openly defy her teacher's authority and this defiance was not sustained.

There were many times, however, when she engaged in a softer form of opposition which involved delays in completing her work while she pursued her own interests in the classroom. This softer form of opposition required from Cathy a willingness and ability to discern the teacher's moods and to adjust her behaviour accordingly. In this classroom, such opposition was productive in winning Cathy more freedom than she would have had if she had either engaged in more overt opposition or if she had been totally compliant.

Cathy's relationship with her teacher was generally characterized by the mutual trust which is so central to the pedagogical relationship, but in this class she had limited opportunities to engage in dialogue. Her teacher was often unavailable to her, and her interactions with her peers were often characterized by conflicts or threats of conflict which could not be understood or resolved without more adult support.

## Cathy's Reading and Writing

Cathy's way of making meaning of schooling in general, and her teacher in particular, enabled her to go along with classroom procedures while at the same time allowing her to engage in covert opposition in ways that slowed her completion of her work. In this section, I will describe more fully her thinking about, and response to, particular reading and writing activities in this classroom.

### The Learning Centres

As was noted previously, Cathy firmly believed that what she was learning in school was important for her later success in life. When I asked her why the children were required to complete the tasks at the learning centre, she referred to this purpose for reading:

> Why we do [the Dinosaur Centre] is important. If you don't know how to read you can't live, basically. Just can't. If I couldn't read, I'd be nowhere in life. You can't go anywhere if you can't read. Say you were a construction worker, okay? And you didn't know how to read, so you didn't read these danger signs. So you just walk into a pit and fall down. Others see the danger sign so they walk away. And here you are knocked out in this pit cause you couldn't read.

However this purpose for reading was not sufficient to sustain Cathy's interest in the reading and writing

activities at the dinosaur centre. She often dawdled at completing the activities, and fell behind in this work until the teacher threatened to contact her mother if Cathy did not catch up. I asked Cathy why she was slow in completing the tasks. Her reply indicated that she thought the reading comprehension exercises were not only boring, but unproductive for her learning:

> All you had to do was read and write. Read and write. It was easy. You had to read a card cause it had next to nothing on it. It just asks you questions and they were really easy questions.

As a result, even when she was required to think about what she had read and did have an opportunity to be more creative, she did not follow this up. For example, she wrote this response to a question which provided her with a full page to use what she had learned in order to express an opinion as to whether birds might have evolved from reptiles:

> I think birds did developed from reptiles because they are sort of the same thing.

Cathy's opinion of the Food Centre was much more favourable than was her opinion of the Dinosaur Centre. In contrast to the latter, in which reading passages and activity cards had a worksheet-like appearance, the articles about food were taken from children's magazines and had a dynamic, attractive appearance. These were usually

illustrated in colour, and Cathy noted that the illustrations "make me hungry." As well, she liked the hands-on activities, which provided her with additional concrete connections to the meaning of what she was reading. Thus, when I asked her why the children were required to work at the Food Centre, she gave a work-related justification but then added a comment indicating that for her intrinsic interest in the topic was more important than the functional use of the information. At the end of the following excerpt from one of our conversations her voice rose noticeably when she told me about the origin of the word "salt," as if she were still highly fascinated by this presumably surprising information:

> Cathy: Have to do this experiment [for an activity which she was completing]. And have to put this water and salt in the water. And you have to put it by the window and let the water evaporate. And see what the salt crystals look like.
>
> Carol: What do you think of doing this kind of thing?
>
> Cathy: I don't know. It's kind of neat, but the water's not evaporating.
>
> Carol: Do you know Mrs. T.'s reasoning behind asking you to do those kinds of things?
>
> Cathy: I think she just wants us to learn more about it, and kind of become--like--kind of like she wants us to know all about it.

Carol: All about what?

Cathy: Salt and stuff. Just in case we want to do that when we get older or something. If you work in a salt factory.

Carol: Do you feel you're learning interesting things?

Cathy: Yeah. Did you know "celery" is actually a latin word for salt?

Reading Books

Cathy told me that she enjoyed reading at home and at school. She said she preferred two kinds of books: funny ones and mysteries. She frequently made reference to the former when telling me about books that she liked, using words like "hilarious," "hysterical," and "really funny" to describe them. She also recounted many humorous episodes from these books, and sometimes giggled when she related events from them. Mystery was what drew Cathy to books like those in the Nancy Drew series. She told me that she liked the suspense and would sometimes manipulate her reading in order to extend this aesthetic aspect of her reading:

> Like, you read one chapter. And at the end of this one chapter she got a note in her car. It said, "The clock's ticking, Nancy Drew, but not for long. Time's up." I stopped reading right there cause I wanted the suspense.

Cathy reported that her teachers and family members influenced her choice of books. One example of this was in

her explanation of how she came to read Nancy Drew books for the home reading program. She told me that one day she had complained to her father about being bored while staying at his house, so he took her upstairs and showed her his sister's old collection of Nancy Drew books. Cathy started to read one and liked it, so her mother later bought her another Nancy Drew book for Christmas. She said that she enjoyed reading additional books in the series because "they're all connected." In the Spring, Cathy decided to write about one of the books for the home reading program which had been developed by her teacher.

Another example was her selection of Go Jump in the Pool (Korman, 1979), which was one of the humorous books which she liked:

> It looked funny. And Mrs. T. was reading us all these Bruno and Boots books. And she was reading all those kinds of books and so I thought it would be neat to read another one.

A third example was her account of why she was glad that Mrs. T. was reading The Hobbit (Tolkein, 1984) to the class:

> Well one time I tried to read my brother's edition of it and I just got so confused, you know. Cause I read it fast. Cause I wanted to get into this book cause my brother said it's a really good book. So I was kind of reading it fast, right? And I just couldn't understand it. But Mrs. T. reads

it slow and easy. And she reads the voices [with expression] and everything.

Cathy told me that the purpose of reading books was for recreation. Her replies were invariably negative when I asked her whether particular stories, or books in general reminded her of problems that occur in real life. Her reply was also negative when I asked her if authors had put messages or lessons in the stories she had read. She did say that sometimes characters reminded her of herself or people she knew, but then would go on to describe relatively superficial characteristics, as opposed to the ways in which they dealt with life's dilemmas. For example, she cited one character from a book she had otherwise forgotten (and which she could not name) who reminded her of her friend Ashley, because "she's so weird and made this boy laugh." She also noted that Nancy Drew's friend, Bess was like her grandmother because "she likes to shop."

In all my conversations with Cathy, and in my reading of her response journals there were few indicators that she viewed reading as an activity in which she might make meaning of her problems, and think about how she might resolve them. In fact, there was an indication that she preferred that problematic aspects of life not enter her reading. This occurred when I asked her whether she had ever read any stories about divorce, since her parents' divorce was something that still troubled her:

> No, I try to stay away from that because if I do read books like that it'll make me cry and everything. And I get like that. It'll make me cry. So my mom told me not to read that kind of books.

In general, she chose to read books which were more imaginative and which did not deal directly with the harsher realities of life. In the six months of my study the one exception to this was her reading of I Won't Let Them Hurt You (Barr, 1989) for her home reading program. In her response journal she wrote that this book was "about a babysitter that is babysitting a chid that she thinks is being abused," and stated that it was "a great book," and "I learned a lot about child abuse and what to do." However, Cathy did not write about this book again, nor did she evidently read another on this or a similar topic.

In general, Cathy's written responses to her reading were filled with brief synopsis, summaries, commentaries on the parts of books that she liked (usually the funny ones), and on the characters, and some speculation on what would happen next. The general tone was conversational, as if Cathy were writing personal letters to a friend. Sometimes her entries began with "Dear Mrs. T," and ended with "Sincerely, Cathy."

When Mrs. T. felt that Cathy's written comments were adequate, she put a checkmark, a stamp of a happy face, or a

sticker beside it. When she thought that they were inadequate, she wrote reminders for Cathy to proofread and edit her work. She also made written comments such as "You also need to tell me more detail about the story and your reactions to it," and "Tell me about the characters. What are your impressions of the story so far? You need to read and respond more." These comments were motivated by the teacher's belief that her role was to encourage Cathy to independently develop her own responses.

For Cathy, however, the addition of writing to her reading transformed what had been a pleasurable activity into one which she now found difficult. She did not see that writing about what she read might help her develop her thoughts and feelings about it:

> Cathy: I can never, you know, express my feelings. I just write down what I read.
>
> Carol: And she says that's not good enough?
>
> Cathy: Yeah.
>
> Carol: Why would she ask you to do that?
>
> Cathy: I think she just wants proof that you read it.

As was noted previously, Cathy's frustration with this process resulted in frequent delays in completing her response journal as well as, at one point, actively refusing to do it.

## Creative Writing

Cathy found it much easier to write stories and poems in this classroom than to write responses to what she had read. Part of what made this task easier for her was the structure that she and the other children received when the teacher provided the whole class with topics, genres, and/or examples for each writing assignment. Cathy said that having to work with the teacher's ideas sometimes made it more difficult to write, but in general she preferred it when the teacher provided this guidance because, "Sometimes you feel lazy and you want someone to give you something like--kind of like--the answer."

Besides, in all of the writing assignments which I knew of during the study, there was scope for each child to write about what was important to him or her, and sometimes the assignment was specifically designed to elicit personal expression. An example of this was the writing of the "name poem," in which the children wrote descriptions of themselves using words which began with each of the letters in their first names. In the following, Cathy told me how the teacher provided the structure for her name poem, and she supplied the content:

> You had to put your name and then you had to write about yourself. That's cool.

In all of the writing samples which Cathy and I discussed, she was able to identify how she had synthesized

her own ideas with those of the teacher's in order to produce what she usually thought was good writing. An example of this is the following description of how she wrote a structured poem about Frankenstein for Halloween. In this description Cathy indicated her awareness of the teacher's structure, and the openings she could take to draw on her personal experiences to make the writing her own:

> Cathy: She told us to write this kind of poem, which is this kind [referring to the sample]. And we--it was Halloween so we could pick any kind Halloween monster or anything we wanted, and write about it. So, I kind of thought of Frankenstein cause that's what my brother's being for Christmas [sic]. Well, actually he was Mr. Munster and I was Mrs. Munster.
>
> Carol: How did you make a poem like this?
>
> Cathy: Actually, okay, you put two word that describe--you put one word. Title. You put two words that describe your title. Three words in kinda like a sentence, but describing the word. And then you write a sentence about it. And then put another word for the monster.
>
> Carol: That's a good poem.
>
> Cathy: Cause you know his name is Victor. Frankenstein.
>
> Carol: How did you know that?

Cathy: I did the learning centre card.

The following is another example of how she synthesized ideas for writing, in this case, for a story called "On the Other Side of the Fence:

Cathy: The teacher gave us an opportunity for a couple [of different stories]. The fence was there, and there was something about a school. But I kind of put two of them together. The fence and the school one. Cause mine was a school kind of thing behind the fence.

Carol: Were you thinking of something from your life or from your story?

Cathy: Well, actually, it was kind of daydreaming while the teacher was talking. So, I didn't have any ideas so I was just daydreaming and then she said--and I was picturing in my mind a graveyard. I don't know why. And then I go, "Hey! That's it! That's what I'll do!" I was just daydreaming.

What also made this writing easier for Cathy was the nature of the audience and the purpose for creative writing in this classroom. The reader response journals were read only by the teacher, but stories and poems were always posted in the classroom, or in the hallway, to be read by others. Cathy felt that the main purpose of this writing was to entertain her readers in the same way that professional authors entertained her. Thus, when she told me why she

liked particular pieces she had written, she used the same criteria that she applied to what she thought were good books. For example, she said she liked one of her stories because, "It's funny. It's hilarious. It's really good." A more specific example is her description of why she liked her essay, "The Grossest Edible Sandwich:"

> The grossest edible sandwich. I put everything on it. Everything I could think of. Absolutely everything I could think of. All the meat in the world and everything but--and so I named it the grossest edible sandwich. Cause it had everything on it. That'd be kind of gross wouldn't it? The grossest edible sandwich. Had mayonnaise, ham, mustard. Everything.

As with her reading, Cathy thought that her writing involved entertainment rather than exploring some of the challenges life had to offer. This was most evident when she criticized one of her own stories, a reworking of "Cinderella," because it did not have a problem in it. She related the need for a problem to the need for action in a narrative:

> Cathy: Cause, like "Little Red Riding Hood," "Three Bears," you know. It's always something bad. If there's nothing bad, nothing happens.
>
> Carol: Can you say that again?
>
> Cathy: Nothing happened. Everything's just--

nobody's bad. It just seemed kind of weird.

Carol: So if no one's bad nothing ever really happens in a story?

Cathy: Not really. At least that's what I think.

Carol: When you were writing this story were you thinking about it, or was it only after you finished it?

Cathy: After I finished it.

Carol: What could you do if you were writing that story again?

Cathy: I could make Cinderella bad and the three stepsisters good and the mom good. That's kind of weird.

The Dialogue Journal

Cathy's writing in her dialogue journal was like a series of disjointed friendly letters, in which she reported a variety of events and details about herself, but did not explore any of them in depth. The following is her first entry of the year school year:

My summer was great! Well, ok. there was some bad momist. Frit I went to my Dads house for a week you see my mom and dad are dvorist. But eneway I allso went to my tuntus hose (it Dutch for Ante) she lives in lodminaster. Oh and a bad thing happinde. My bunny Die.

Later entries contained brief announcements of a

variety of her activities outside of the school, usually involving extended family members or friends. These include camping trips, a trip to Calgary for Highland dancing, and a sleepover. In response to these entries the teacher wrote comments like, "I'm glad you had fun," and asked for more detail about events that Cathy reported. For example, when Cathy wrote that her uncle had a birthday, the teacher asked, "Did you go to their place for a party?"

One day, Mrs. T. told the children that if they could not think of what to write in their journals, they could write a wish. This is what Cathy wrote:

> Dear Mrs. T.
>
> I am going to tell you three wishes and why I whant them number one wish I whant my dad to get remairde so that I can live with him instead of my mom number two wish I wish Ashley was my sister 'cause Ashley's mom is nicer than my mom. wish number three I wish that my mom and dad were back together.

Mrs. T. wrote, "When did your parents divorce?" She also took Cathy aside and told her that she understood how she felt because her own parents were divorced too. In the next entry in her journal, Cathy informed her that her parents had divorced when she was three. Then she added, "Dear Mrs. T. I love your class. I love since [science]." This seemed to be a constrained way of saying, "I love you."

The rest of the journal continued with bits and pieces of personal news interspersed with the occasionally more serious messages, such as the complaint about the home reading program. If she had a problem, the journal was a way for Cathy to share that problem with her teacher, but the expectation was that problems were best resolved through oral discussion and face to face interaction--not through writing:

> Carol: Some kids write about personal things in their journal. Sometimes you mention personal things [in yours] but you don't go on about it. Did you ever think of writing things down like that in your journal?
>
> Cathy: I do but I don't feel comfortable talking about it. Like writing it down. I feel like talking with a person. And looking at them. And talking like that. I just can't write down my feelings.
>
> Carol: Can you put into words how it feels different when you write it down?
>
> Cathy: You just can't explain everything. I mean, I get into something. Get into it, you know? Like with my mom. Me and my mom talk about private things. We just go on for hours. It's just different when you write it down. You can't, you can't get it all, you know. Cause I don't want to.

I'd mention it but that's all.

### Summary of Cathy's Reading and Writing

Cathy was one of the more articulate girls in this class, and one of the most accomplished in her reading and writing. What sustained Cathy's involvement in school-based reading and writing were her recreational and social experiences with these activities, and her belief that reading and writing were both important for her future. In these reading and writing activities she looked for, and made use of, social support to make decisions while at the same time drawing on her own experiences to make meaning. However, this support was often unavailable because the teacher was occupied with children whose problems were more pressing than Cathy's, and in the peer group there were too many conflicts when the children were allowed to interact with each other.

# CHAPTER SIX

## ELAINE

### Talking With Elaine

Elaine was a girl who looked Caucasian but who sometimes identified herself as "Native." She usually socialized with the streetwise girls but had friends in other peer groups as well. The conversations which I had with Elaine were different in many ways from those which I had with Cathy.

One difference was that throughout our conversations, Elaine made several comments and questions which indicated that she had not thought clearly about what I was doing in the classroom, the way that Cathy and many of the other children did. For example, in May she asked me if I would be returning the following year and I told her that I would not because I would be writing "my book." She looked very surprised at this and asked, "You have to write a book?" I was surprised that she would ask this because, since January, she had received the same briefing about my project that the other children had, had been present when I discussed my book with the class, and at times had looked at my fieldnotes. I found it striking that she had not made sense of what I was doing there in the way that most of the other children had; at the very least I would have expected her to ask about the presence of the tape-recorder if she had not initially understood what I was doing.

Another difference was that when opportunities to discuss Elaine's family arose in our conversations, she would often change the topic, as if she did not feel comfortable exploring family matters with me. In this respect it is important to note that Mrs. T. knew enough about the family situation to know that it was an unstable one, but Elaine and her parents were reticent with her about their home life too. As well, another adult in the school told me that at one point Elaine told her she was not allowed to talk about family events while in the school. Her hesitancy in discussing her home life placed constraints on what I could learn about her.

Elaine's talk was often confused and disjointed, even when it was obvious that she was genuinely trying to provide clarification. Often, her talk was marked by abrupt changes in topic, searches for vocabulary with which she could express herself, and comments like, "I should explain it more better," and "I'm so confused." As well, her talk was sometimes so rapid that I could not make out what she was saying until I later replayed it with the tape recorder set at such a slow speed that my own speech was unintelligible. When Elaine talked like this, I usually tried to clarify what she was saying by backtracking over details with her, and paraphrasing and posing questions to add specificity. It seems that this process was beneficial for her, because she commented that talking to me helped her "get things off my

chest," and "helped me clear my mind."

### Elaine and Her Family

Elaine lived in the local neighbourhood with a stepfather, his brother, her mother, and her brother. She also mentioned a "baby brother," whom she said was living with his own "stepdad." She told me the following about her father, and this is consistent with what her cousin, who attended the same class, said:

> Elaine: My father, my real father is dead....My mom moved out on him because he was an alcoholic and she didn't like him around us drinking and that. So we moved and he killed himself because he couldn't ever see us again....And um my mom wouldn't let him see us because she, like, she doesn't like him drinking around us. So he killed himself. Do you know how?
>
> Carol: How?
>
> Elaine: He stuck a drug needle in his arm and killed himself.

Like the families of the other streetwise girls, Elaine's family had moved from one inner-city location to another many times. She said that she had attended three schools prior to coming to the current one the year before the study. She told me that the family moved frequently because, "Sometimes we get tired of the house we're living in and one time my brother got us evicted." She said that,

although she missed her friends when she moved, she liked moving because, "It's, like, changes." She told me the following, which indicated her mother was talking about moving to the country to avoid the bad influences of the city, but there was not enough money to make this move:

> Like, right now it costs--because she--she doesn't like this neighbourhood. She thinks it's bad for us. Like how to act and do stuff. Um, we might be moving to an acreage or something by my grandma's house.

This pattern of movement was not the only indicator of instability in the family's past and future. Earlier in the school year Elaine wrote in her journal that her mother was pregnant and she and Elaine's "dad" (stepfather) were going to be married. Elaine was quite happy about this but later she told me that they had "changed their minds or something." Later still, she said, "My family's ruined," and told me that her parents were constantly fighting because her stepfather often disappeared and, "He's, like, always bothering my mom." This topic arose because she had told me that she took some of her mother's sleeping pills and had been rushed to the hospital, and I asked her why she had done it. She said that she had not done this to hurt herself. It was more likely a vague attempt to escape family conflicts with which she might have had no other way of dealing.

## Accounts of Talk in the Home

When Elaine told me about problems at home or at school, I asked whether she was able to talk to someone at home about them. Her replies consistently indicated that she did not have opportunities to do so. For example, when she told me how much it bothered her that she had not known her father, I asked her whether she asked her mother about him, and she replied that she did not because, "It hurts my stepdad." On another occasion, when she told me that her parents' fighting upset her, I asked her whether she could talk to her mother about it:

> Elaine: Well I just see [her mother cry when she was angry at Elaine's stepfather] Cause when she does it, it feels, like, depressed. So I leave. But the last time I went to talk to her about it. And she wouldn't talk because she was um she was um watchacallit...nervous to talk about it.

There was another occasion when I asked her whether she could talk to her mother about the problems she had at school, and her reply indicated that she could not:

> Elaine: Every day I talk to my mom about what I did in school.
>
> Carol: What does your mom say?
>
> Elaine: Tells me how I should solve my problems.
>
> Carol: Can you give me an example?
>
> Elaine: Like the time I missed school cause I

slept in, she told me that I should solve it by not getting mad and she could write a note and she's going to buy me an alarm clock.

Carol: What does she say when you're mad at the teacher?

Elaine: I forgot. Cause it's a long time ago that she told me.

Finally, she said the following when I asked her whether she could talk at home about the problems she was having in school:

Elaine: Well my mom. She tells me. Because, like, if anything's wrong with me, she tells me to sit down and talk about it. And she said if you don't feel like it you don't have to. But I always do.

Carol: It's hard being a kid sometimes, isn't it?

Elaine: Except I think that--talking to my mom--I don't think I should tell her about Mrs. T. [meaning, the problems she was having with Mrs. T.] because it has to do with school and that.

One of her few references to talk in the home was related to Elaine's having declared herself to be Native so that she could attend the school's Sacred Circle Program. This occurred in February and when I asked her about it, Elaine told me that she was Native because her stepfather was, and she showed me a beautiful little Native doll which she said he had given her. In April, however, Elaine told me

that "I don't face myself as an Indian," because her stepfather had told her that Indians engage in crimes such as "b and e's," and raping "little girls." Thus, "I don't want to be an Indian because Indians do bad stuff and I want to be a good person." However, as will be noted again later, her identity as a Native person seemed to also be related to dynamics in the streetwise peer group.

Home, Schooling and the Future

Elaine's talk about her future was just as vague as was her talk about her past. She thought she would become a lawyer but had little idea of what this entailed. She told me that all she knew about lawyers came from television and this was that they "ask people questions," for reasons which she did not know. She had little sense of work and education in relation to upward mobility:

> Carol: What is it that makes some people rich and other people poor?
>
> Elaine: People who become poor are people who don't have jobs and you live on the streets or something like that. And people who are rich. They get, like doctor, and can make lots of money. Or someone like your auntie, like they're really rich. Like they're famous and they, like, leave you the money after their herit--how do you say it? Will?

There were few indicators that Elaine's parents were

giving her guidance to get through her schooling, even though she referred occasionally to her mother listening to her read, and wrote in her journal that her mother wanted her to bring more homework home. For example, one day Elaine did not arrive at school in the morning, and after a routine phone call was made to her home, it was reported that her mother seemed to be unconcerned that Elaine had disappeared somewhere between the home and the school.

Another example of this lack of attention concerned Elaine's need for eye glasses. When I began the study, Elaine's squint was so strong that I immediately asked her teacher about it, thinking that perhaps Elaine had lost her glasses. The teacher said she had repeatedly told the mother about the need to have the girl's eyes checked but this had not been done. Later, Elaine wrote in her journal to ask her teacher for help in getting eye glasses. It was through arrangements made by the teacher and the school nurse that Elaine received them.

Mrs. T. told me that, in general, when she talked to Elaine's mother, she was left frustrated with the experience. She said that, however much Elaine's mother stated that she wanted Elaine to do well in school, she did not seem to be attending to the teacher's suggestions.

## Relationships With Peers

### Girls

Elaine was the only girl in this class who associated with the streetwise girls as well as the other girls both inside and outside of the class. However, it was the streetwise girls who figured most prominently in our conversations and with whom she interacted most often. Her decision to declare herself Native seemed to be related to interactions in this group, as the two full Native girls told me they thought Elaine had called herself Native so that she could be with them. At one point, later in the study, Elaine said that if you are Native, then the Native girls will "try to hang around you."

In some ways Elaine's accounts of conflicts with her streetwise friends were remarkably similar to Cathy's accounts of conflicts with hers, even though they were referring to two different peer groups. One point of similarity was the way in which their relationships were in a constant state of flux as a result of conflict. Elaine said:

> Well, we get into a fight. Next minute we're friends again. Fight. Friends. Fight. Friends. And then friends and friends and friends and then fight and fight and fight.

Another point of similarity was the way in which the girls were reported to test each other by making them choose

between friends. Sometimes this was by direct requests:

> Like, when Corinne tries to be a baby and tries to take Jolene away--Like, she'll go--sometimes she'll go, "Will you be my friend?" and we say, "Yes," all the time. And then she'll go, "Jolene do you like Elaine?" And she'll go, "Yes." And she goes, "Well, if you like her, you can't play."

At other times, Elaine also said the need to make choices stemmed from what seemed to be a more tacit need to take sides in a dispute:

> Like if they say something [insulting] to them I get really mad because they're my best friend. And they're enemies so I can't be their friend.

A third point of similarity was that when the girls were angry at each other they would fling insults at each other or, even worse, betray each other's confidences. Thus, one day when I asked Elaine if the girls ever talked about the kinds of problems that she and I had talked about she said that they did not because she never knew who was a real friend and who was "faking" being a friend. She thought that if you told a friend about a problem, there was a strong chance that the friend would, "Like, talk. Tell everybody." Thus, Elaine's friendships afforded her no more opportunity to engage in dialogue than did her relationships in the home.

Elaine's conflicts in the streetwise group were

compounded by the influence of tougher kids, many of whom were much older than she was. While disputes among Cathy and her friends were usually private affairs, disputes in Elaine's group were public affairs in which there was a great deal of peer pressure to win a conflict by fighting.

Elaine told me of being at such a fight between two older girls at a nearby store. Based on her account it is not clear what had happened but one of the girls had apparently said that the other girls' mother was a "97th street slut." The second girl needed to fight to save face in light of this insult. Elaine, Corinne, and Jolene were all watching this conflict and Corinne said to the girls, "Let's beat her up." According to one of the girls, Corinne then hit her. These kinds of fights were common among the tougher girls. They were often scheduled to take place off school property and outside of school hours so that school authorities could not intervene. That these fights always had audiences indicates the importance of peers in extending them.

Elaine told me about another fight which occurred between her and a girl in another class. She said that the other girl had been spreading lies about Elaine's friend, who was also in the other class. Because of this, when they came into the school, Elaine pushed the girl into another one, who then tripped her. She said she had done this because the other girl had lied about her friend but she

also added the following, which highlights the significance of the need to save face when there was a public conflict:

> And I hate people who lie. And, like, when you're outside and people are watching around, you--you get embarrassed. Cause you just walk away. So you have to fight.

When she later retold this story, Elaine added, "Everyone was saying, 'Beat her up.'" The implication was that her friendship with the other girl was being publicly tested by her willingness to fight on her behalf. This was consistent with her earlier explanation of why the girls in her school fought so much:

> Elaine: ...and we get into arguments and everything. And, like, when people think that they're so tough and everything they want to beat somebody up because of anger. Because they don't want to do anything to their self.
>
> Carol: Because why?
>
> Elaine: Cause they don't want to do anything to their self
>
> Carol: I don't understand what you mean.
>
> Elaine: Like they don't want to--like--hurt theirself by--like--by--like--okay--Like, they don't want to hurt theirself by not being their best friends' friend no more.

One day a boy in another class was involved in a fight

and I asked Elaine to tell me about it. She said:

> He just beat him up for no reason. Because lots of people want him to. So he just does it without thinking.

This seemed to apply to her. Although she did think about the influences of peers on her, she did not think about it clearly enough in order to resist this influence.

If any event should have caused Elaine to think about her relationships with others, it was the time that she was seriously threatened by an older, much larger girl. This occurred after Elaine had insulted her friend and classmate, Jolene, in an unspecified way. At lunch hour Jolene's mother phoned the school to warn the principal that Jolene's older sister and her friends [all of whom were in junior high school, including Corinne's older brother] were coming to the school to beat up some of the children, which meant Elaine. When the teens arrived at the school ground they refused to leave even when told to do so by the playground supervisor and the principal. From a distance I could hear one of them saying to the principal in a sarcastic voice, "We're really scared!" Eventually they agreed to leave the property, and the matter was then transferred over to the police because these youth had committed similar acts in the past. Corinne told me that one of them was on probation. The authorities and all the children believed that the threat against Elaine had been a serious one.

Shortly after this, Elaine told me that she did not want to be Indian anymore. Jolene's family moved and she left the school. After Jolene left, Elaine often complained to me about her. She said, for example:

> It was only because of Jolene that me and Corinne aren't friends anymore. Cause, like she has a sister and if none of us are friends she'll just get them after us.

Although she recognized that Jolene had power over her because of her sister, she never had the opportunity to resolve her relationship with Jolene. This was evident in the way in which she continued to contradict herself when talking about her:

> And I wished I never even played with Jolene. But I like her. She's a good friend. She's really nice.

In fact after Jolene left the school Elaine became friends with Shannon, who moved in the same crowd, and whose older sister was also a constant threat to the other children. In this way she was repeating the pattern of becoming involved with peers who were likely to involve her more deeply in street life.

## Boys

Elaine's interactions with the boys in her class were marked by more overt conflict than were Cathy's. Often I heard her exchanging angry words with them, calling them

names, telling them to "shut up," and even hitting them lightly. She was, however, quick to back down by falling silent or retreating when the boys stood up to her because she did not have the verbal skills that were needed to engage in, and win, exchanges of insults with the boys. If she did not back down, then she would lose control, much to the delight of her opponent and the onlookers:

> I just get turned around. I just get really mad...when Martin calls me names I hit him back. He hits me. I hit him back and then [the teacher makes us stop].

In my observation of her in the classroom, Elaine always seemed to easily forgive and forget when these events occurred, and I often saw her cheerfully socializing with boys who, only moments earlier, had insulted her or gotten her into trouble. In this respect she was different from some of the other girls, who bore grudges against boys who harassed them or bossed them around. When I asked her about her willingness to forget about her disputes with the boys, she said that it was "really weird" that she did this so readily. Her forgetfulness when it came to boy-girl conflicts was consistent with her forgetfulness on a variety of other matters. However, it might also have been compounded by the perceived need to have a boyfriend.

Elaine's boyfriend was in another class and so was not part of this study. However, on more than one occasion I saw

Elaine and her boyfriend walking around the school ground arm-in-arm and even exchanging quick kisses in front of the other children. One day when the children were coming in from recess I heard some of them arguing about whether or not Elaine and her boyfriend had actually French-kissed. When Elaine arrived and heard this, she insisted that they had done so.

### Elaine and Her Teacher

If I were Elaine's teacher, I would probably write in her report card that she was "easily distracted." However, "drives her teacher to distraction" would also be accurate. In the classroom Elaine often flitted from place to place, from one social interaction to another, and from one activity to the next before the first activity was completed. On more than one occasion I saw her take a few steps in one direction and then turn around with a puzzled look on her face, as if she had forgotten where she was headed. She also had the habit of sighing loudly, rolling her eyes, and muttering a long, "Oh," when she appeared to be confused. In spite of this, she seemed to be very easygoing and cheerful much of the time in the classroom. When there was a problem, she was quick to forget it and turn to a new task or social partner.

There were also many moments when she did attend well to her work for extended periods of time. Usually this was when the entire class was silent, or when she sat alone at

the back of the classroom or moved her desk to the front of the room, away from the other children. Often at these times I could hear her reading aloud to herself.

In class Mrs. T. and Elaine were often visibly exasperated with each other, but when they had disputes, these were usually short-lived. They usually began with Elaine responding to discipline with a short, angry retort, and they ended with her falling silent in the face of a glare from her teacher. For example, one day a boy came to class in tears and it was not clear whether the children who approached him and were talking to him were offering support or whether they were harassing them, so Mrs. T. told them all to leave him alone. The children obeyed this request and went to their desks, but then Elaine rose and walked over to the boy. The teacher told her to sit down and Elaine responded with an angry look and tone of voice, "Well he's crying and I don't like to see my friends cry." Mrs. T. stared at her in silence and Elaine then sat down. In these and similar instances it was not long before she seemed to have forgotten the conflict and was back to her cheerful self again.

My conversations with Elaine indicated that her anger at her teacher was not sustained on a continuous basis. Even though Elaine complained to me extensively about her teacher's "unfairness," and occasionally used terms such as "bitch" to describe her, she also referred to her at times

as "nice," "a good friend," and "a good teacher." She also made many comments indicating that she blamed herself and other children for problems between them and the teacher. For example, she said the teacher disciplined the class because "we're always noisy" and "we were bad," and she admitted that the teacher disciplined her in particular because "I just rush through my work," and "I don't really listen". At one point in a conversation, when I asked her why she made a statement about her teacher which contradicted one of her earlier ones, she looked at me, as if puzzled, and said, "Well I don't know why I would ever say that!"

Elaine often voiced bitter complaints about the teacher's unfairness in behaviours that had gone unnoticed or were forgiven by children such as Cathy. For example, she told me that the teacher often sat on the top of students' desks but then chastised the children when they did so, saying that they would cause the desk to break. The following is another example, which was voiced by Elaine, and was consistent with my own observations:

> This is a very important thing. Like, for recess, when she's talking. She. She'll sit and talk and talk and talk and talk [even after the bell has rung for] recess, after school, or lunches...and she tells us not to waste her lunchtime.

A third example was the teacher's tendency to raise her

voice when she was addressing an individual while the children were working. Elaine told me that this was particularly problematic for her because when she heard Mrs. T. talking, she could not concentrate. Besides, she pointed out, why should Mrs. T. be allowed to violate her own rule of using "20 centimetre voices?"

> Like, when someone's talking she just--like--Like, I wish I could do the same thing she does to us....I think she--like--she--she wants to do what she wants to do. Like, she can do what she wants to do but we can't do it.

Elaine did not complain directly to her teacher about these matters. The other children, usually the boys, often did, and when they did so Mrs. T. was often open to discussion with them. When I asked Elaine why she did not voice her complaints to the teacher, she gave two main reasons: "I don't know how to say it" and "She'll just get mad." In my observations, it did seem that Elaine had difficulty communicating with her teacher, and her teacher in turn found it difficult to remain patient with her, particularly when their discussions took place in the middle of lessons, when Mrs. T. had concerns about the other children.

The first time this was evident in my observations was when the teacher provided Elaine with oral feedback with respect to what she had written in her novel-response

journal. I did not hear what the teacher said but I saw Elaine tear the page with the response out of the journal. When I asked her why she had done this she said that the teacher had told her to. Overhearing this, Mrs. T. came over and angrily told Elaine that she had not told her to rip out the page. Instead of wasting time re-doing her work, Elaine was supposed to have taken the feedback into consideration when writing her next response! This reply resulted in a brief argument between the two with Elaine insisting that Mrs. T. had told her to re-do the page, and Mrs. T. insisting that Elaine had misunderstood. Finally the teacher gave up and went to work with another child. Elaine went to the teacher's desk to get materials to cut and tape the page back in again. She spent the rest of the Language Arts period doing this and did not return to her writing. At the time it seemed that Elaine genuinely misunderstood Mrs. T.'s instructions. However, later, when I asked her about it, she said that she had understood that Mrs. T. did not want her to rewrite the page and that she had done it simply because she wanted to.

There was another occasion which illustrated the difficulty of speaking to Elaine about the conflicts she had with her teacher. This occurred on a Friday afternoon, when there had been one problem after another in the class and the teacher told the whole class to be quiet so that she could give instructions for making Mother's Day cards. All

the other children fell silent but Elaine spoke up, saying something which I did not hear. Mrs. T., by her own admission, immediately "lost it," and shouted at Elaine, "That's it!" Elaine started to argue that the other children had also been talking and it was unfair to single her out. It was as if she was oblivious to the fact that the other children had responded immediately to Mrs. T.'s demand for silence and that they were all now waiting to start making their Mother's Day cards. Mrs. T. told her to go to the spare room which was across the hallway from the classroom, and Elaine left the class. However, after the children started making the cards and Mrs. T. went to speak to her, Elaine was missing. Mrs. T. then went down to the office to report that Elaine had disappeared and talked to the secretary about this incident. Then she turned around and realized that Elaine had been sitting in the time-out cubicle in the office all along. She brought her back to the classroom and both acted as if nothing had happened.

I did not have an opportunity to ask Elaine about it until the following week, when I asked her what she had said to cause Mrs. T. to "lose it." The difficulty I had in getting her to reconstruct the events highlights how difficult it would have been for her teacher to talk to her about them:

Carol: You were the one that tipped her over a little bit.

> Elaine: Okay, well first of all I was sitting there and she goes, um, she goes, "If you guys don't be quiet you'll miss your gym on Monday." And I said, "We always do." And then she goes, "Get out. Get out." And then I stayed in here [the spare room, where the interviews were held] and then she said,"You'll stay there for the whole afternoon. Stay forty-five minutes after school." So, it's like, Math period...and she told me to spend forty-five minutes after school. Cause that's how much we have for our Math period....

She went on to say that the teacher had come to talk to her in the spare room and Elaine had told her that whatever had happened was not her fault because she had been with me:

> And then she sent me down to the office. And then after that she brought me back up. That's what we were doing...but I can't remember what I did.

As Elaine talked, I realized that she had juxtaposed at least two different disciplinary episodes. Thus, I tried to help her reconstruct events by telling her what I had seen before she left the room on the day in question. Elaine looked surprised and said, "Oh! That was the day we were doing the Mother's Day cards." She tried again to tell me what happened, but then gave up and said, "Oh, I'm so confused." Then I asked her why the teacher had become angry and she replied, "I don't know. She just lost it when we

were talking together."

The preceding incidents were examples of ones in which Elaine's behaviour was clearly oppositional to her teacher, but even in our one-on-one conversations it was difficult to know whether this opposition was deliberate or whether it was the result of Elaine's ongoing confusion about events in the classroom. The ambiguity of her behaviour and intentions made it particularly difficult for her teacher to find a consistent frame of reference within which she could interpret Elaine's needs and deal with her opposition. In her attempts to make sense of Elaine, Mrs. T. wondered whether she had Attention Deficit Disorder and she thought about Elaine's problems at home and the way in which she seemed to be unduly influenced by other children. At other times she expressed frustration to me about Elaine's apparent laziness and deliberate avoidance of work. Throughout the study she remained uncertain as to whether Elaine needed more structure and guidance, or whether she simply needed to be held more accountable for her behaviour.

### Summary of Elaine's Compliance and Opposition

In this class, much of Elaine's behaviour indicated that she did not accept the teacher's authority over her. She frequently violated class rules by talking out of turn, delayed the completion of her work, and made defiant remarks when she was angry at the teacher. She engaged in both overt and covert opposition but this was on a sporadic basis and

it seemed to reflect the difficulty she had in making sense of what was going on in the classroom.

Although I did not obtain sufficient information about Elaine's home to make definite statements about her life there, all indicators were that her home life was unstable, and by her own account she had little opportunity to talk to adults in the home about conflicts and problems. This was consistent with the difficulty she had in using language to communicate meanings in our one-on-one conversations and with the difficulty she had in focusing her attention in the class for extended periods of time. It was also consistent with the lack of continuity in Elaine's thinking and behaviour when it came to acceptance or rejection of her teacher's authority.

Just as Elaine had difficulty in making sense of her teacher, so too did her teacher have difficulty in making sense of her. For the most part, she interpreted Elaine's talk and behaviour as indicators that the girl was not going to make use of her guidance. In a classroom context where so many children had extreme needs and some of them demonstrated that they were willing and able to make use of the teacher's guidance, this resulted in the teacher not attending to Elaine's needs and providing her as much support as she needed.

In contrast to Cathy, Elaine did not make links among schooling, her family's past, and her future. Her

relationships in this classroom, like those outside of the classroom, seemed to be rooted in the here and now, with her ethnic identity and friendships shifting with the tides of various events. I felt that this left her vulnerable to people who, in contrast to her teacher, might want to control her in ways that were against her best interests. In particular if she associated more and more with the older streetwise kids, they would continue to involve her in destructive activities. She did not seem to be receiving support and structure from adults and, because of this, she was more open to accepting it from older youth.

## Elaine's Reading and Writing

Elaine's way of making sense of school events, and life in general, was marked by abrupt shifts in her thinking, and these shifts were evident in her seemingly "flighty" behaviour in class. In her case, opposition to the teacher and class activities can be interpreted as a response to difficulties in organizing her thinking. In this section, I will explore this phenomenon more fully in relation to her reading and writing.

### Reading Books

Elaine was not fond of reading. She said that she read little at home, except for parts of the newspaper, in particular, the pictures of "Sunshine Boys." She said her mother had recently started ordering books for her from a book club because "she wants me to read more so I can get

more better at my reading," but then said that most of the books she received were too difficult for her.

Elaine also had difficulty selecting appropriate reading material for her novel study in class. She told me that her teacher suggested that she read Owls in the Family (Mowat, 1970) for her first novel study in the current year, and "I thought I would finish that to read but I guess I was wrong." However the teacher said that she had discouraged Elaine from choosing this book because she knew that Elaine would have problems reading it. According to Mrs. T., it was only after Elaine realized she could not continue reading this book that she followed the teacher's suggestion and turned to Here She Is, Miss Teeny Wonderful (Godfrey, 1984). Elaine said she finally picked the latter book because "I thought it would be ea--not easy but I thought it would be kind of good" and "I wanted to see if I could make a goal for myself to finish." Her explanation indicated that she associated this reading more with the need to complete her work in class and to become a better reader rather than to gain enjoyment or satisfaction from the reading process.

According to Elaine, a good book would have "actions and mysteries and stuff like that in it. Not just plain old story." She said that the difference between a good book and a "boring" one was the presence or absence of "detail," which she checked for before she started reading. This seemed to be more important to her than the content of the

book:

> Like, first I read at the back to see how the book is like. And sometimes they don't put enough details so I start reading the book and if I don't like it I just quit on it. Pick another book and if I read on the back it has lots of detail, but not that much, I start reading it. And then it has a mystery and that to it. I like to read it. But it doesn't have to be mystery. Can be history or science. Anything.

Elaine's preference for detail in books was likely related to the emphasis which the teacher placed on the need for detail in the children's writing. Elaine said she preferred books with detail because, "You can get a lot of work done out of them. Like, you can write more. It gives you ideas to write about." She tried to explain this further:

> Elaine: More detail, well, it gives more answers to your questions. And it gives [unintelligible]
>
> Carol: Does that make it easier to read?
>
> Elaine: Yeah.
>
> Carol: Is that because it explains exactly what's going on?
>
> Elaine: Yeah...cause it'll say, "Why do you think Miss Teeny Wonderful wants to join the contest?" And then it'll just go on with a completely

different thing.

Elaine's reference to the need for detail might also have been a reference to the need to have something in a book that could sustain her attention. Otherwise, she was prone to being distracted by the noise in the classroom, missing connections between one part of a book and another, and losing track of what was going on in a story. She told me that when this happened, she would forget what the book was about, and have to start reading it all over again. Because of this, reading was not a meaningful activity for her, and she told me that in class she often simply pretended to be engaged in the activity.

Elaine's oral and written accounts of her reading indicated that she either had not read particular books, or had substantially misread them. In two of Elaine's journal entries for the home reading program she copied all or part of the book's summary which had been written on the back cover of the book. In a third entry, for Sarah Plain and Tall (MacLachlin, 1985), she wrote the following, which did not happen in the book:

> I think that when Caleb asked his Mom and Dad if they had Danced before they said yes so at the end of the book. Caleb asked his dad if they could teach him how to dance it took lots of praces but at the every end he became a perfasul dancer and everybody loved him.

When I asked her what she thought of the book, she gave the following reply, in which she stated that at the end of the story Sarah does not return to the family. In fact, in the story Sarah did return to the family and the story had a very happy ending:

> Well, what did I think of it? Well, it was a good book cause when--this girl wrote a letter saying she would be there and she came there. And, um, they weren't expecting her. And she just said I'll be in the yellow--tall. I'll be tall. I'll be, like yellow bonnet. And I'll be wearing green. Brown luggage. And wait for me by the train. So they did that. And she'd been living there for a couple of years now. And she had to go back to see the family. And she never came back after that. It was sad.

In her reading of this book, Elaine did not just miss important details. She also missed an important connection between the characters and herself, because much of the tension in the book involves the longings and hopes of two children who lost a parent at a young age.

Another book which might have spoken to Elaine's experiences was Here She is, Miss Teeny Wonderful (1983), which she read in class for the novel study. This book is about a preteen girl whose mother enters her into a national beauty contest. Much of the book is a humorous account of

how this normally "tomboyish" girl tries to be herself while resisting conventional notions of femineity. In one of Elaine's journal entries about this book she did say that the main character was like herself, but this was because they both often had bruises and scrapes on them. When I asked her about this, she again related events which did not happen in the story:

> Well, Carol [the name of the character]. I liked her. She was kind of like me. And she calls, like--when she calls someone to come with, uh, to the place she's going to. Vancouver. And she asks Wally, too. And Wally thought she was asking him out. And that's what happens sometimes when I ask them.

Like Cathy, she did not perceive her reader-response journal to be a vehicle through which she might develop her thoughts and feelings about what she read. Instead she thought the purpose of the journal was for the teacher to "see how we're doing," "see if we need help," "how our listening skills are," and "get marks for our report card." She told me that in this journal, "you just write whatever you feel is necessary," presumably, to satisfy the teacher. Most of her entries in her response journals were only three or four sentences long. They contained brief notes about how some of the characters were like people she knew, predictions about what was going to happen, and questions

such as "I wonder what her poem is about?" She also sometimes noted that she had "nothing to write on this chapter," and wrote commentaries such as the following:

> I dislike this writing because I think that they should put in more action, detail, feeling, and more to it. Because if you can put in more of these things it would make it more exciting for Chapter 2 and then people will thing it's very interesting.

As was noted in an earlier discussion, the teacher did not engage the children in whole class or small groups in dialogues about what they read. Instead, the children carried out their reading independently, and she provided them with oral and written feedback on an individual basis. When her feedback focused on the content, this was designed to elicit the children's comments. For example, in response to the preceding entry, Mrs. T. wrote, "Give some examples of where it is dull and boring." Another example was when Elaine wrote, "This character reminds me of somebody...," and the teacher responded, "Which character?" Elaine never replied in writing to the teacher's questions and comments, nor did she follow-up on suggestions such as "proofread."

It is important to note that the only two books which Elaine seemed to have read and enjoyed were those that were favoured by the children who sat near her in the class. One of the these books was <u>The Value of Believing in Yourself</u>

(Spencer, 1976). This is a short, didactic biography of Louis Pasteur, with a focus on the cure he developed for rabies. It is part of a series of books that contain similar biographies about characters such as Benjamin Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. In the book about Louis Pasteur, the illustrations depict cartoon-like soldiers which personify germs. This personification caused confusion for Elaine. At one point, she told me that "the cure was these little soldiers that go into the body--your body and kill." At another point she told me that there was in the book "some kind of liquid pretending be soldiers or something." She felt that the story was "really weird" and it could not be a true one. What the book actually meant to her, however, remains an open question:

> Elaine: [It] tells so much. Like how to cure stuff. And the book I read was, um, Value of Believing in Yourself. And, um, and uh this first guy had to cure--had to get a cure for these soldiers.
>
> Carol: Do you know what that means when they say 'believing in yourself?'
>
> Elaine: Not really. That means like you know you can do it. Just try it out first.
>
> Carol: Did that happen in the story?
>
> Elaine: Yeah. For--well, it took him a long time to get the uh cure for it. But when he found out.

So, the last thing he tried with it was the cure.

The other book was Sideways Stories at Wayside School (Sachar, 1989) When I first saw Elaine reading this whimsical story in the classroom, she was laughing out loud to herself and wanted to read parts of it to me. Then when I asked her about it in a subsequent interview, she gave a relatively accurate account of some of the events:

> Well, Mrs. Gorf, she's a really mean teacher.... Like, she's a really mean teacher. She'll wiggle her ears. Wiggle her tongue. First her right ear and then her left....And one day she turned all the kids into apples. She was leaving from the classroom and they jumped all over her and said "Turn us back. Or we'll keep on doing--or jumping on you." And so they turned 'em back. And then she says, "You little brats, I'm going to turn you back." And they shone a mirror when she said that. And then and then they looked like monkeys. I don't know why, though....

Elaine seemed to have been much more involved with this book than she had been with any other. Her involvement with this book was also likely related to the way that she discovered it, on a sleepover with a friend:

> She's reading it and she's telling me about it. And I just read the first chapter and like, wow! Boy, this is a good story. But that was on the

> weekend. Every time before we went to bed we would sleep [meaning that they would read]. Like, it was for our--I think it was two weeks a weekend. And then, um, and then she was telling me about it so I started reading it. Like, we would read every time before we go to bed.

Elaine's involvement in the book was likely related to the absurdity of the plot, in which anything could happen, seemingly without reason. It seemed fitting that she could relate this absurdity to life in her own classroom:

> Elaine: Well, Mrs. T. She's always mean and everything. But she wants to do something to us and she does. But Gorf, she uh, she can do something. But I think they're alike--like, in the way--like in the way they want to do something. But Mrs. Gorf can and she [Mrs. T.] can't.
>
> Carol: How do you mean?
>
> Elaine: Well, like wiggle her left ear. Wiggle her right. Stick out her tongue so we turn into apples or something.
>
> Carol: You're thinking Mrs. T. would like to do something like that if she had a chance?
>
> Elaine: Probably.

For Elaine the connections were strong enough that when I asked her what she would do if her school was like the one in the book, it was evident that she had already thought

about it:

> And I was going to pick the water fountain into pop--like, when you press the thing pop comes out. And you could drink it forever...and I was thinking--for--there'd be two washrooms. And the other two washrooms can be full of junkfood...and if you get three check--like, names on blackboard. Checkmark and a circle around your name. Oh, what did I say again? You would only have to stay in school five minutes....

The teacher was not involved in Elaine's reading of this book. Thus, what Elaine found in this book was not extended to other reading materials.

## Creative Writing

When Elaine and I talked about her writing, she did not elaborate on what the process or product mean to her. Instead, she simply provided direct answers to my questions as if she were providing information that warranted consideration only because I needed to know something about her writing. The following is one example, when she responded to a question about how she developed her ideas for writing a particular story:

> My teacher gave us, tell me about a story and I write what it is on, and if I have trouble with my writing she says I can print. And that's about it.

In general, from looking at the products of her writing as well as what she said about it, it seemed that Elaine wrote "whatever is necessary" in order to get it done at a particular time, rather than to express her feelings and ideas. She told me that in writing one poem, she copied some suggested words off the blackboard, and when writing another poem she simply put down a friend's ideas. Even when she showed me a poem in which she had used her own ideas, Elaine's comments suggested that she did not feel she had, or could have, expressed herself:

> Elaine: Well, I like this one. It was fun to do. And you, like, runs. Whatever the colour was you would write with the colour of the thing on there.
>
> Carol: Which one was your favourite colour?
>
> Elaine: My favourite colour is blue.
>
> Carol: Is it because of the ocean [written in the poem]?
>
> Elaine: Yeah. What's your favourite colour in the world?

The one exception to this was when she wrote "The Greatest Gift in the World," just prior to Christmas. Mrs. T. had told the class to imagine a gift they would give someone if they could give any gift in the world. This is what Elaine wrote:

> If I had a wish to give someone something I would pick a person that respects me and has a good

> personality. Like my best teacher her name is Mrs. T. I would give her a brand new car and a better classroom. I think that Mrs. T. would like it because Mrs. T. can trust us.

The teacher said that this had been written on a day when the class had misbehaved a great deal and she "lost it" with them. She said that when she saw it, she felt guilty about having mistreated her class. However, neither she nor Elaine communicated with each other about what Elaine had written, so Elaine did not receive a response to her attempt at conciliatory communication, and thus it was not extended into a dialogue.

## The Dialogue Journal

If there was one context in which Elaine might have been expected to put more of herself into her writing, this would have been the dialogue journal in which the children wrote in the mornings. Elaine's journal was much like Cathy's, in that it contained a combination of diary-like news about what was happening in her life, and more serious matters to be shared with her teacher. The latter were matters such as her stepfather's release from jail, her mother's reported pregnancy, and Elaine's need for eye glasses. The following example is typical of her entries, in that Elaine reported, but did not explore, her awareness that a young girl had disappeared in a community which she visited:

> When I went to [the community] a little girl got tooken away at the Mall and the cops came to my friends house and ask us if we had seen the little girl and he showed us a picture and we said we have not seen her. Then we went to the park and played their for a long time and I got to see my boyfriend and we all played T.V. tag. Then we went home on the bus.

As was noted previously, the teacher's instructions and feedback for the journals did not clearly indicate that the purpose was to help them reflect on their thoughts and feelings, or to share them with her. In Elaine's journal she made encouraging comments such as "You wrote just fine in your journal," when Elaine apologized for her sloppiness, and she made brief comments about the content, such as "You have lots of friends!" and "Boy, you sure do watch a lot of movies!" However, she did not provide structure or support for developing the meanings further. Thus, like Cathy, Elaine found that writing her ideas was much more difficult than speaking about them:

> Carol: When you write personal things does it feel good to write about them? Would you like to write more about them or not really?
>
> Elaine: Yeah, well, I can't get enough detail into put into it. Like, like, the words. What you mean, to put in the journal.

Carol: What do you mean?

Elaine: Words that I mean. Words that she understands [that would enable her to understand]. And to give the thing more detail. But, like, it's hard to explain because you're writing it and can't talk about it. It's hard.

It is not difficult to see why this would be hard for Elaine. It was already very hard for her to communicate orally, even in the one-on-one context of our interviews where I could provide her with the support she needed to shape her thoughts and the continuity to see how one idea might be linked to another.

### Summary of Elaine's Reading and Writing

In summary, Elaine was less independent than Cathy was in using reading and writing to shape her thoughts and to communicate. As a result, she often did not complete the reading and writing that was assigned to her, and when she did complete these, it was with minimal involvement.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## SHANNON

### Talking With Shannon

Shannon arrived at this classroom in mid-April. After she had been there for a few days, I approached her with a permission slip for the study and tried to tell her about my research. She interrupted my explanation by saying, "You're going to test me, right?" When I started to explain it again, she continued to interrupt with, "I can do it! I'm allowed!" The following day she told me that she wanted to be interviewed, and when I replied that I could not do this until her note was signed, she responded with an angry, "Awwww." She then slunk down into her seat with an exaggerated pout on her face.

Early in our first private conversation, it was apparent that she had a strong need for a confidante, and she was starting to think that I might be the right person to fill this role. The following part of the conversation took place after she told me she would like to be a social worker and help abused kids, and I had asked her if she would tell a teacher if she were abused. Here, she indicated a hope that she might feel freer to talk to me about some matters, than she felt with other adults in the school:

> Shannon: [The teacher would] go and tell a social worker or something...but if I told you couldn't, you probably wouldn't. Right?

Carol: Well actually if it was something where I thought--

Shannon: If it was something serious I wouldn't care. But if it was just a couple of hits here and there and if I was worried about myself I'd tell you. And if I say you can go tell someone you would. But if it wasn't serious you wouldn't. Right?

Throughout our discussions there was often a strong tension between what Shannon likely wanted to tell me, and what she felt she could tell me. There were fairly clear markers in her talk when she was monitoring, and sometimes self-censoring, what she said. These included a nervous laugh, comments like "I forget," and her occasional backtracking to change what she had said. The following are three examples:

1. Like, I didn't drink [the beer]. Whoever was with me did. I forget who it was....

2. He had to go to work. But I forget what he does. No, I forget. I'd tell you, but-- [laughs]

3. And he did dope and my mom didn't know. And my mom had a little bit up in the cupboard....It wasn't my mom's drugs. I don't know whose it was.

There were also many moments when she overcame this tension, presumably because of her strong need to talk and to know that what she had to say was being accepted. For

example, in our first private conversation she refused to tell me what her mother did because "I don't butt into her life." In a later conversation, she said her mother was a stripper. Later still, she brought me her mother's "promo picture" to look at. The following is another example:

> Shannon:...and then she went and bought. I forgot who it was. A pack of cigarettes. But she was like, five or six.
>
> Carol: A little girl?
>
> Shannon: No. She was nine or ten and she knew her. I'm not going to say the name cause it's in this school. But um wait. No, she was ten or twelve. she's in our class. And it wasn't um, Corinne
>
> Carol: It doesn't matter who--
>
> Shannon: Okay. It was Jolene.

In fact there were times when Shannon told me much more than I wanted to hear, and at times she made specific requests to get my advice on various matters. When this occurred I made ongoing attempts to get her to talk to the school counsellor instead of me. Eventually she started to do so, and enroled in one of the counsellor's support groups which met once weekly to discuss family break-ups. After the first meeting of this group she approached me excitedly, and told me how great it was to know that other children had problems like hers. However, she later refused at some points to mention particular things to the counsellor. She

said to me that she preferred to talk to me because, "I trust you." I interpreted this as reflecting a problem in the broader context where the counsellor could not be as consistently available for her as I was. Because of this availability it was not as easy for Shannon to get to know her as someone she could trust.

In addition to viewing me as a confidante, Shannon seemed to view me as a vehicle for making her experiences known to others. She never showed any curiosity about what my book was for and what it would be like, but she was constantly aware of the tape-recorder, and often referred to it during our talks. At first, whenever she would look at it suspiciously and ask questions like, "Who's going to be listening to this?" I always responded by reassuring her that I would not use anything in my book that she did not wish me to. However, the following conversation occurred in June, and indicates that the potential dissemination of information about her was enhancing her sense of voice:

> Shannon: Is this tape recorder working? Are you sure we're getting on it?
>
> Carol: Yeah we're getting on it. But I'm not going to use stuff that you don't want me to.
>
> Shannon: No. I just want to be sure that I'm on it.
>
> Carol: Do you want to be on it?
>
> Shannon: Yeah....Turn the taperecorder up.

Another time she said:

> I should tell the tape recorder so **they** [emphasis added] can hear me.

This sense eventually became so strong that at the end of the study she started to insist that I use her real name, and became angry when I told her that I could not:

> Shannon: I think it should be free. Like, so everybody knows how you feel about your feelings.
>
> Carol: What about if you mentioned something that happened in your family?
>
> Shannon: I always said, "Are you going to tape this? Are we going to fight about this?" And you always say, "No, if you don't want me to. And I say, "Good." So you'll know.
>
> Carol: But I'm wondering if I changed your name, could I write about [the things she had told me]?
>
> Shannon: Yeah.

It is interesting that she said she had asked if we were going to fight about the tape recorder. In fact, she had not asked this, nor had we ever argued about it. She had always taken more ownership over our conversations than any of the other children. This ownership likely meant a great deal to her.

However, it is important to emphasize that our relationship was stormy at times! One problem was the extent to which she tried to monopolize my attention when we were

in class, and seek favours from me, such as allowing her to use the photocopier in the school office. In contrast to the other children she would not accept my reminders of the need to avoid favouring one child over another. She insisted that the other children would not care if she received special favours. However, in this class, the children did care and they had all recognized my need to appear to be neutral. One child had already suggested that I was favouring Shannon because we were talking so much together.

Another problem occurred at times when the teacher left the classroom. At these times the other children agreed that I could instill strict silence and sometimes ask children to leave the classroom to avoid problems. However, Shannon did not accept this. On one occasion, when I finally got her to leave the room because of her disruptive behaviour, I heard her shouting in the hallway. The teacher said she had yelled, "Carol has no right to treat me like that! She's not my teacher!"

A third problem was that there were times when she tried to use my study to manipulate others. One of these times was when I overheard her calling another girl "a bitch." Her friend, Corinne, heard this and said to her in a shocked voice, "You can't talk like that. It's not allowed." Shannon replied loudly, "Carol said I could."

I tried to talk to Shannon about our conflicts but she did not want to do so. She simply replied, "I was just

kidding," when I brought it up. Given that we had only a short time left together I did not want to risk our trust and rapport (which by this time seemed to be more important for her well-being than it was for my study) by pushing the discussion. Instead, whenever we met again after a conflict I would make a point of being cheerful and accepting with her, and she responded in kind. The following conversation exemplifies the strength of our bond, which survived our conflicts and perhaps was strengthened by them. This conversation took place while she was making some cards and decided to give one to me. I will refer to these cards again later:

Shannon: Yours gets a rose in it for helping me

Carol: You're the one whose helping me, you know. Cause you're helping me understand kids. Especially you.

Shannon: Yeah, but you're also helping me get out my feelings.

It is important to emphasize that Shannon did not always seem to be telling me what she thought to be true. This was most evident in those stories where she changed details upon my questioning. When events from outside of the classroom are included in the following discussion, these are the ones which I either knew to be true or which I felt were plausible in the context of everything that I knew about her.

## Shannon and Her Family

Shannon came from a complicated family. When she enroled in Mrs. T.'s fifth grade class, she was living with her mother and older sister and brother in a neighbourhood near Stanton School. She said that her mother was of French ancestry and her father was Metis. She also said her father was an alcoholic who quit drinking when he joined "A and E." He lived in another province with Shannon's stepmother and stepsister. Shannon also referred to her "baby brother" who was living in another province with his father, who was Shannon's mother's ex-boyfriend.

### Ethnic Identity

Shannon looked Caucasian, like her mother, but she identified herself to me as Native and attended the school's Sacred Circle program. She told me that the first time she became aware of Native-White differences was when she was about four and was visiting the home of a friend who was Native:

> And, like, they thought I was White. And her mom goes, "Get out of my house. We don't allow White here." Right? And then I guess I started talking a little bit Native [with a Native dialect]. Like I am now, I think. And the teacher--the mom--goes, "Are you Native?" And I go, "Yeah." And I always remember that cause it was funny.

Based on what she said, it did not seem that she had

access to Native traditions through her family. For example, she told me that she did not know much about how traditional Native people raise their kids because "I don't know my Native grandma." Instead, what she knew about Native cultures seemed to come from her school studies and her own experiences. The Sacred Circle program was designed to help urban Native children like these learn Native cultures, but Shannon had not been in the program long. The following statements indicate how she linked Native traditions with life as she knew it:

> Shannon: Like, Natives had to live free and that. And have fights. Like, Iroquois--but--Algonquians and Hurons and that. They like, uh, they fought with the uh, Iroquois with the White....
> Carol: Do you think that has an influence on the way Native kids are today? Say, for example, yourself?
> Shannon: Yeah. Because--say--like, my dad's Native. You know how, like his parents and his parents and parents. Like, they had tough kids and tough kids and tough kids and that. So I guess they--it just followed in the family or something....Native people think it's cool to smoke....I guess it's natural because you know how, like, they smoked pot or something. I don't know what it was.

Carol: In the old days?

Shannon: Yeah. And they passed it around in those pipe things. And they had a kid with them. And I guess Native kids start.

Although Shannon thought of herself as Native she also frequently stressed to me, "I'm only half-Native." She said that this was because she could not quite see things like "ghosts," the way children who spoke Cree could. She also said that she was only half-Native because she was not quite tough enough to be fully Native. This belief will be explored more fully later, in the context of her peer relationships.

## Shifts in Family Relationships

Shannon had moved a number of times. She said that she had spent her early years with her father in the other province. However, "my dad always got my stepmom to hit me and that," and she said that after she talked to her school counsellor about it, arrangements were made for her to return to her mother in Edmonton. Following this, her family moved at least three times. Because of these moves Shannon attended Stanton school in fourth grade, and then two other inner-city schools before returning to Stanton in fifth grade. Like Elaine and the other streetwise girls, Shannon also talked about moving again. At various times she referred to going back to where her father lived, or moving with her mother to the other province so that her mother

could be with either her ex-boyfriend or a new one.

With respect to the latter, she referred to her mother's boyfriends and ex-boyfriends frequently. She said her mother had told her that getting married was "the stupidest thing to do." Shannon said this was because if you are married, "you break up more." She clarified this to mean that when the relationship did break up (which seemed to her to be inevitable) "you won't be sad" if he was your boyfriend rather than your husband.

Even when Shannon was in her mother's custody, she did not always live with her. Much of the time she stayed in the home of Corinne, a Native Special Needs child who attended the same classroom. According to Corinne and Mrs. T. (who knew Corinne's adoptive mother quite well) Corinne's mother was taking care of a number of children in formal or informal foster care arrangements. This woman had known Shannon's mother for a long time and often took care of her children. Shannon put it this way:

> ...my mom calls her "Mom." Cause when we were really little. Like, when I was two years old or something we lived across the street from her and she was babysitting us all the time. And we started living with her and that.

During the course of the study, Shannon was still often staying with Corinne's mother. However, she and her sister were at one point "banded" from that home. Corinne and

Shannon both said that this was because Shannon and her siblings had been accused of causing too much trouble there. This included Shannon's twelve-year old brother getting drunk with Corinne's older brother.

Mrs. T. and I thought there were indications that sometimes Shannon did not have any place to stay. Eventually her home came under investigation by authorities. The day after social workers visited her home, she wanted to tell me what had happened. She knew that she might be placed in foster care, and was very angry about this, saying, "I'll die before I let then take me!" She said that what scared her most about being apprehended was that her mother had said she would kill herself if she lost her children. This is similar to what Elaine thought had happened to her father. It put Shannon in a position where she felt that she had to resist authorities.

A few days later, a reading specialist arrived at the school to test Shannon. Without thinking (and much to her own regret), the teacher told Shannon that there was someone at the classroom door to see her. According to Mrs. T., Shannon took one look at the woman and, assuming she was a social worker, burst into tears. However, the next week when I asked if she knew what was going to happen to her, she replied, "I never cared anyway." As will be noted later, this was a response she often made at moments when our discussions raised points that were likely too painful for

her to talk about.

Rejection

Throughout our conversations, many of her comments indicated that she did not feel cared-for by her parents. She said, "I don't think my dad cares about me." The following are some of the comments which she made when talking about conflicts with her mother, which indicate the rejection that she experienced in her conflicts with her:

1. She, uh, kind of says, like, she kind of says, "If you're not going to talk proper don't talk at all." Just like most parents say, "If you're not going to say anything nice, don't say anything at all." But my mom. Last night she was talking and um, like, I say "holay." It's supposed to be "holy" but I said "holay." My mom, she hit me on the head. Not hard, but tapped me, right?
2. ...and I didn't want my stupid nylons that I was wearing. And because my mom said it's cold and she's ashamed of my legs. They're scrawny.
3. My mom. If we're being bad: "Shut up and go to your room." And if we're being mouthy and that. And she's like [to her friends], "Stupid. They're just acting like that to impress you guys." Cause we always show off.

This feeling of rejection was not only within the family context. It seemed to occur between the family and

representatives of mainstream society. That Shannon was originally reluctant to tell me her mother's profession was perhaps a reflection of this. Another reflection of this rejection was when she told me that her mother wanted the children to be baptized but the priest refused to do it:

> Carol: What did your mom say?
>
> Shannon: "Screw you."
>
> Carol: "Screw you?" She must have been mad.
>
> Shannon: She didn't care.
>
> Carol: How do you feel about that?
>
> Shannon: If they're, like, Christian, they want everybody else to be Christian. Cause they like to be Christian and I ask lots of people that and they go, "Yeah." And I go, "Would you like everybody in the world to be Christians?" "Yeah." Then why won't they let us be Christians?

As will be noted later, the experience of rejection characterized her experience with her teacher and peers as well.

## Coping

Within the family context, as with her references to relationships outside the family context, Shannon's response to this feeling of rejection varied, as if she were experimenting with various ways of coping with her experience, let alone making sense of it. In the preceding example, "screw you," indicates Shannon's interpretation of

her mother's response as one of opposition and anger. This response is similar to what she said when the children were making Mother's Day cards in the classroom. Shannon refused to make one, saying, "My mother doesn't deserve one."

At other times in our conversations, Shannon seemed to be trying to believe that one would not be rejected if one were good enough:

> Carol: What would be a good example of a job for you?
>
> Shannon: Like, a social worker or something. Cause, like most of the kids I know, they get hit lots and that. And I always talk to them and I say, "If your parents--don't go home late and try to act better and maybe they'll quit hitting you."
>
> Carol: Wait a minute. I just want to make sure I understand what you're saying. You'd tell the kids that if they behaved--
>
> Shannon: This happened to me before....

Sometimes, Shannon seemed to be trying vainly to make the best of an unhappy situation. She said the following when we talked about her and her siblings being left on their own when her mother went out with her friends and did not return:

> Shannon: And it's scary. That's what I think is cool. Do you know why?
>
> Carol: Why?

Shannon: Because, because my brother has a chance to be, uh, what's it called--to be, uh, responsible. So I think it's cool and it's nice of her.

However, her strongest response to the experience of rejection was to pretend that it was not important to her. For example, she said that when she was left on her own she would be frightened but could control this fear:

Shannon: Hey! I'm here alone and I'm not scared. And I don't complain. It's going to keep happening. So I think that's good. Because my fears are gone.

Carol: Sometimes what happens, though, is you think your fears are gone but they're just getting deeper and deeper inside of you. And that can be hard sometimes because then they'll come out really suddenly sometimes.

Shannon: Yeah, and then what I do is, I just pretend that nothing's happening. Everything's fine in the family. I'm not scared. It's, like, my life. Nobody else. Like, I know how to run it. And I'm not fine--I'm not--I'm not--how's the word? Uh, scared.

To pretend that she did not care was a way for Shannon to deal with a variety of problems in relationships. As mentioned previously she said that to remain unmarried was a

way of minimizing hurt in a relationship. She also said she did not care whether she would be apprehended, and she said that her mother did not care about the children being baptized. Another time, I asked her whether she was still seeing Jolene and her sister after they left the neighbourhood. She responded, "I don't care." Then, when she mentioned her brother's drinking, I asked her if she had anyone to talk to about it. She replied, "Not really. I don't even care. Just pretend it didn't happen."

### The Future

Shannon and I did not talk much about her future. When we did so, it seemed that there was a tension between what she imagined might be possible with a conventional life, and what she thought would happen, based on the lives of the people around her. At various points she said that she would like to be a teacher, counsellor, or social worker when she grew up. This was so that she could "help kids" who had problems similar to her own. However, after she thought she was going to be apprehended we had a conversation in which I asked her again about her future plans and she said that she was now thinking of being a stripper, like her mother.

## Shannon and Her Peers

### Being Tough

Like Elaine, Shannon was one of the streetwise girls who associated with each other in class. Outside of the class, their broader peer group included children from other

classes in the same school, as well as the older siblings of Shannon, Jolene, and Corinne. Shannon was more explicit in detailing their activities to me than Elaine was. These included smoking, drinking, taking drugs, engaging in vandalism, and fighting. Shannon smoked regularly and talked about fighting. She did not admit to engaging in the other illicit activities but it is not hard to imagine her doing so:

> Because, like, I know this little girl. I'm not going to say her name, but. I forget [her name]. But she was like, her older sister's best friend. And her older sister was grounded so she went out and her older sister's best friend. I think was Celeste or something. And she was getting stoned with the little girl around her. And she asked the little girl if she wanted any. And the little girl was about eight or nine and she did. And she got really stoned.

As was mentioned previously, Shannon linked toughness with the idea of being Native. It is difficult to tell how much this belief had developed through her experiences in other communities, such as the one in which she lived with her father, and how much had developed in relation to the group with which she currently hung around. In either case, this belief was strong and she mentioned it frequently, as in the following example:

> Mostly Natives pick on other kids cause, like, most of the time Natives think they're tougher than white people are. And black people think they're tougher than white people and Native people.

Just as she saw herself as only half-Native, so too did Shannon see herself as not quite as tough as the Native kids. This may have been related to the fact that she was very small for her age, and quite thin. As the following selection from one of our conversations indicates, she was insecure about her status in this regard:

> Shannon: People in my family say I'm tough and that. But I know I have no muscles. I know I'm a little bit tough....I can still beat people up because I think I'm tough or something, but [her voice trails off, as if in doubt].
>
> Carol: Do you think it's in your attitude?
>
> Shannon: People think it's in your strength.
>
> Carol: Like, physical strength?
>
> Shannon: And people will try to get me into a fight. And I say, "No, there's no reason to." So, like--it's just--people say I'm tough and I'm smart. Because I can still beat people up. Because I think I'm tough. And like, this girl [in her previous school]. She had really big muscles and that. Because, like, she's full Native and most Cree Natives are tough and that. And

they have big muscles. And that's how they were born, or something. She goes, "Oh, I'm tougher than you cause you're scrawny and that."

Locating Friends

Shannon recognized that to attempt to live up to this toughness meant that she would be distanced from what she called "white kids," or the more conventional ones in this classroom. At some points she indicated she thought this was due to racism, and at other points she referred to the extent to which white kids would be frightened of the Native ones:

If I was white I wouldn't hang around with Native people because, like, myself, personally, I'm scared of whole Natives. Cause they're a little bit tough, like. And, uh, I wouldn't hang around with Natives but--like, maybe that's why white people don't hang around with Natives and maybe Natives think white people are kind of wimps or something.

On the other hand according to her, if she hung around with white kids, the Native kids would not accept her:

Carol: I noticed that you hang around with--a lot of them are Native kids.

Shannon: Well, actually, all of them are.

Carol: What do you have in common with them that would be different from, say, white girls?

Shannon: Well, some. It's like, just--like, some of the people that I used to hang around with, they'd beat me up and that if I hang around with white people. And now I'm used to hanging around with Natives.

She went on to explain that this was not because white kids pick on Native kids. Instead:

Shannon: Like, once I was hanging around with Elaine. And, uh, my [Native] friend said that, um she--like, Elaine wasn't allowed to talk to her cause she was Native [meaning that the other girl was Native, but Elaine was not]. But Elaine wasn't Native. And, uh, so now we're allowed to hang around with her because we were all going to Sacred Circle. And she was there. So now I'm allowed to hang around with her. Most of the time.

Carol: You mean, allowed by your friends?

Shannon: Yeah. Most of the time I listen to my friends. Cause I think it's right to hang around with your own culture.

Besides,

Most white people don't like me. So, I think, well, if I was white, I wouldn't have no friends barely.

In fact, with the exception of the streetwise girls, the children in her classroom were not comfortable with

Shannon. This was because she was not only assertive but could be belligerent when she was not in a good mood. Like Elaine, she would call the boys names and would provoke them by action like taking things from their desk. However, with Shannon, the boys did not often respond the way they would when Elaine and other girls did these things. Instead of trying to win such a conflict, the boy would scowl and mutter, and then turn away from her. The reason for this difference was that whenever Shannon engaged in a conflict with another child there was a tacit and sometimes explicit threat that her older sister would beat up the child. During the course of the study I never heard of her actually fulfilling this threat, but the other children acted as though the threat were real. As was discussed in the section about Elaine, a precedent had been set by the Jolene's older sister's involvement in her quarrels. Because of this, it was safer for the other children to avoid interacting with Shannon when she was acting in a belligerent fashion.

Loneliness

The response of the other children in this class meant that after her friend, Jolene, left the school and after there were conflicts between Shannon's family and Corinne's which resulted in a conflict between these two girls, Shannon was left in a lonely position.

She was aware that many of the other children in this class did not like her. She told me she had been lonely in

her other school as well. She said that the children there did not like her because, "They said my attitude was sucky." Although the other girls in the current classroom did not say so to her nor to me, it is likely that it is what they thought of her at times. The one exception was Elaine, who was said by Shannon to be her only friend in this class. It is not hard to see why this would be so. Elaine's submissive nature meant that she could be friends with just about anyone.

There was one incident in particular which illustrates the extent to which Shannon's desire for acceptance by others drove her behaviour within the larger peer group. It involved her need to have a boyfriend and, in turn, the need to appear to be willing to fight for him. This occurred one afternoon when she asked me for help with a problem. She said that a girl in another class had "Frenched" Shannon's boyfriend and now she had to fight the girl. This was related to the fact that Elaine had threatened to beat the other girl up because she thought that if the girl had gone after Shannon's boyfriend she would go after her own boyfriend next. As well, Shannon's older sister had told the girl that Shannon would beat her up. This caught Shannon off-guard because normally the sister would have threatened to beat the girl up for her. Now that she was expected to fight her own fight, she was in a difficult position. She was genuinely afraid of getting hurt, since the other girl

had "lots of gangs--these really big guys to walk her around." However, everyone was expecting her to fight. In fact at the end of the school day, there was a crowd of at least fifteen children waiting in the hallway to see what she would do.

When we were talking about this I tried repeatedly to get Shannon to reconsider her relationship with this boy. She resisted the idea that if the boy would French-kiss another girl, then he probably would not be worth fighting for:

> Carol: Well, it seems to me that if another girl tries to French [the boy] then it's his responsibility to stop it.
>
> Shannon: He did.
>
> Carol: Okay then. To me that should put an end to it.
>
> Shannon: Yeah. I said, "Okay, and don't ever try it again. Because if I don't beat you up somebody else that I know will."
>
> Carol: Why doesn't he do something about it? Why is it your responsibility to stop her?

She sidestepped the latter question, but addressed it later:

> He doesn't want me to beat her up. It's just, he thinks--he probably thinks why do you let her get away with kissing your boyfriend and that. I think that's true. Why should I let somebody get away

with kissing my boyfriend?

Besides, she pointed out, if she refused to fight, he would be embarrassed in front of his friends.

In the end Shannon decided to tell the girl that she was letting her off with a warning not to do this again. This strategy averted the fight and allowed Shannon to save face, but it did not help her deal with the relationships within which this conflict occurred. Eventually, Elaine told me that this boy "dumped" Shannon. Corinne said he had not only dumped her, but had ridiculed her in front of everyone. Corinne said he had done this before with Jolene, whom he had called a "slut" and "squaw." I asked Elaine how Shannon responded when the boy dumped her. She quoted Shannon as saying, "I don't care."

### Shannon and Her Teacher

When Shannon arrived at the door of the classroom in April, my immediate impression was that this was a girl whose first day in a new classroom was an important event. This was because she seemed to have dressed up for the occasion. Another initial impression was that this girl was going to pose problems in the classroom. This was because of the nature of the excited buzz among the children in the classroom when they saw her. Indeed, within the first hour of her arrival, I overheard her loudly telling one of the more dominant boys to "shut up."

The teacher was also anticipating problems. She had

taught Shannon's older sister the previous year, and she knew Shannon's past reputation in Stanton School. She showed me the report cards Shannon brought with her from two schools she had attended in the previous year. It was clear from these that Shannon had behaviourial problems in both contexts. However, in the latest of the two schools, the teacher had written about these problems in a positive and optimistic manner. She reported that Shannon was making a great deal of progress in her academic work and her behaviour.

At first, Shannon appeared to be very cooperative with the teacher and eager to engage in the activities which she set up for the class. For example, one day the teacher had the children work in pairs to create alliterative lines using every letter of the alphabet. Shannon picked up the idea very quickly and worked at it for a long period of time. At one point the teacher and I sat with Shannon's group and we all generated these lines together. The teacher said to me, "I'm having fun!" This was a refreshing experience for her because it came at a point when she was increasingly tired and questioning her role with the children.

However, as time went on, Shannon began to make increasing demands on her teacher. When she wanted help she would go to Mrs. T. and insist on getting it immediately. In doing so, she frequently interrupted the teacher when she

was working with other children, and sometimes this was when the need for help was not evident. For example, she would insist on getting help with her spelling when she could have used invented spelling or asked the other children for the words. She also frequently interrupted other speakers when there was a whole-class discussion. As was noted previously, Cathy never did this, and Elaine occasionally disrupted the class but would fall silent when it was apparent that the teacher and/or other children were annoyed with her. Shannon's behaviour was very different from that of both these girls. She not only disrupted the class, but when the teacher chastised her, she would escalate the disruption.

One example of this was when Shannon arrived at the classroom after lunch. There were freshly painted designs on the seat of her pants and because the paint was wet, she could not sit down. She went to the teacher and asked if she could go to the washroom to wash the paint off. The teacher told her to wait until she had called attendance. Shannon remained at the front of the room and in front of the entire class, started wiggling her hips and crossing her legs in a provocative and exaggerated manner. She was shouting loudly, "I'm going to piss my pants!" Even though I had already been in this classroom for almost six months and thought I had seen almost everything, I found this behaviour shocking. This was because of the apparent deliberateness in flaunting not only the teacher's norms, but also that of the other

children. Finally, the teacher let her go to the washroom.

The above is one example of how Shannon's behaviour was sometimes more outrageous than that of any of the other children in the class, including that of the boys who had been formally identified as behaviour disordered. When she was in the heat of a moment of conflict with the teacher, she seemed to be oblivious to the consequences of her actions. Her voice would become loud and shrill and she would not listen to her teacher, nor to me. She was often not even open to the idea of leaving the class in order to calm down. One day, the teacher had to take her by the arm in order to remove her from the room.

Sometimes, after a row with her teacher, Shannon would put her head down, twirl a piece of her hair with her finger, and suck her thumb.

The teacher and I had many discussions about Shannon's behaviour. In some ways it was similar to that of the other girls who opposed the teacher. This was because such opposition appeared to be quite extreme, and the rationale for the opposition was not readily apparent. For example, with respect to the paint incident, Shannon could have just waited before going to the washroom, or she could have told the teacher that she could not wait to relieve herself.

What also made Shannon like these other girls was that her moments of opposition were invariably preceded by attempts to appropriate her teacher's attention. The teacher

interpreted this kind of appropriation as an attempt to control her. She felt that to give children attention under such circumstances was to reinforce their behaviour and set a precedent for the other children's behaviour as well. One day I asked Mrs. T. if she had tried giving these girls more attention when they were behaving appropriately but she said in her experience it did not work because their demands on her would only escalate.

In Shannon's case, I think this was true. Even in her relationship with me she did not recognize that in the classroom context there were constraints on how much attention I could give her. Her oppositional behaviour with her teacher and me did not seem to stem from a resistance to relationship or authority. In fact, it was the opposite. Because of the rejection she had experienced in her other relationships, she was trying quite desperately to hold the attention of someone who might help her.

As time went on, I shared this idea more and more with Mrs. T. One day, she looked at me and said in a sharp voice, "I know all that! But it doesn't help me deal with her!" Mrs. T. was not only trying to understand all the children in her class who had problems, but she was also trying hard to meet a variety of their extreme needs. In contrast to many of the other children, Shannon would not talk to her teacher about her problems even when I suggested that she do so. I thought this was because her relationship with her

teacher was one in which she anticipated rejection in the same way she experienced it in the home and peer contexts. Because she would not talk to her teacher about her problems, it was difficult for the teacher to know where to start with her.

There was a breakthrough in their relationship, however, which occurred in the second last week of school, after Shannon's home was investigated by social workers. In the same conversation in which she said she had not cared about the prospect of apprehension by social workers, we had a long talk about a variety of things, including her school work. While we were talking she started doodling on a scrap of paper, drawing hearts, flowers and other designs. She asked me how to spell my name and wrote it on the picture. At one point when we were talking about her work she said that she felt stupid, and the following discussion ensued:

Carol: Do you ever talk to Mrs. T. about that?

Shannon: No.

Carol: Did you ever think of talking to her about that?

Shannon: No.

Carol: She might be a good person to talk to because she can tell you how you're doing

Shannon: She told me today I could go talk to her anytime I wanted

Carol: Do you like her? Or do you think she's not so nice, or--

Shannon: She's the best teacher in the school

Later in the same conversation, we talked about what I might write about her in "my book." While Shannon continued to draw, I explained my intention in a way which emphasized the need for teachers to be able to understand girls like her:

Carol: Like, if you let me use stuff. If I change your name. Because, what happens in a classroom. Like, if a kid comes in and the kid is mad at the teacher and says, "Oh, you bitch." And starts doing bad things and stuff. Then the teacher might think that's a bad kid. But if I put in my book, here's an example of a kid, well sometimes she did stuff like that, but she had a lot of things to think about.

Shannon: Do those look like roses?

Carol: Yeah they do.

Shannon: I can't draw roses.

Carol: They look nice.

Shannon: I don't know if I'll give this to you yet.

Carol: Well, you decide. I like it. But if they sit there, and then I can explain to them, well, she has a lot of things on her mind. You know, thinking about fighting with her sister, where she's gong to live, she's been in a lot of schools. But I think if they could understand you it would be good.

We both remained silent for some time. Then I asked her:

> Do you ever think of talking to Mrs. T. about some of your problems. Just so she knows you have problems?

She shook her head, and when I asked her why, she said quietly, "Mmmmm."

Later in the same conversation, she decided to make the card for her teacher. I asked her why she had thought of this. She responded:

> Well I think I should give her a chance. To know my attitude, not hers....Well I think I should give her another chance because, like, she deserves it. Maybe it's my attitude, not hers....I'm thinking that she should have another chance to know my feelings about her. That's why. I know it's not just me. And see if I tell her to write back, and maybe I'll know her feelings about me too. Instead of just me knowing her and her knowing me.

In other words, she had decided to take a risk in making explicit to her teacher her desire to be in a relationship with her. She finished making the card and in it she asked the teacher to write back to her. After the teacher found it on her desk, she asked Shannon if she wanted to start a book with her. The teacher wrote the first entry:

Dear Shannon,

This book is a great idea. I really hope you and I can work things out. You are such a neat person! What are you doing this weekend? I am going camping....Would you like this book to be our secret only? I won't tell if you won't.

The two of them wrote back and forth during the last few days of school. Most of their writing was little bits of chitchat interspersed with gestures of affection, such as Shannon's writing, "Peace, dude," to her teacher. Although the contents of the book might seem to be superficial, the process of connecting with her teacher meant a great deal to Shannon. She kept the book on top of her desk and I often saw her reading and rereading it. In our last interview, I asked her how she felt about it:

I think I like her more because, like, I never knew that she was so nice. And she could be so kind to people....I thought she didn't like me.

The preceding comment, however, is not the end of the story. I then asked Shannon if she thought teachers should always keep this kind of book with the kids in their class. Her response indicates her perception of the risk that would be involved in revealing one's thoughts to people who are important to you:

Shannon: Not really. It's, like, it depends on how--if their relationship--like if they are

friends and that. That's the only reason I wanted to write it.

Carol: What would be an example where you would not want to do it with a teacher?

Shannon: If we were good friends and never fighting and everything. Like me and Mrs. T. were at the beginning of the year. I just think why make it better when you might get into a fight?

Shannon's Reading and Writing

In my conversations with Shannon I learned much less about her reading and writing than I was able to learn about Cathy and Elaine's. One reason for this is that she did not engage in these activities in the classroom as much as the other girls in the study did. She had not arrived in the class until April, and even then her involvement in Language Arts was limited because the class as a whole was less involved in it than when the study began, and Shannon herself was often absent, late, out of the class for discussions in the school office, or misbehaving during Language Arts time.

The other reason for lack of information was that when we met for our one-on-one sessions there were more pressing matters to talk about than her reading and writing. These included her family situation, her identity as a Native girl, her problems with her friends and boyfriend, and the possible apprehension by social workers. There were many

moments in our conversations when it seemed inappropriate to talk about her schoolwork instead of these issues. One example of this was when I asked what she thought of the home reading program. This was when she had been thinking and worrying about being apprehended by social workers, so I found myself adding to the question, "Stupid question, right?" Shannon replied, "Nobody can make a kid read," and then we went on to talk about her life outside of the school.

When we did talk about her school-based reading and writing, some of our discussion was about the Language Arts work she had carried out in her prior school and which she brought with her to the current one. Shannon told me that in the prior class the children had free choice of reading materials which they selected from the school library, but the work she showed me consisted of booklets which had been filled with a variety of worksheet pages with reading comprehension and word identification tasks such as cloze activities.

Her talk about the assignments in this booklet indicated that she was more concerned with showing her skills than with use nature of literacy for communication, as when she ignored some of my questions about the content, and referred, instead, to the marks she had received: "See, there's 100% again!" This was consistent with some of what I saw when she was engaged in writing in the classroom. When I

had seen her writing in Language Arts, she had often demonstrated a strong concern for accuracy in her spelling. She told me she wanted the spelling to be correct "cause it means I don't have to do it over." Besides, she told me that she was not happy with her writing when, "I messed up and the teacher thought they [the words she had written] were stupid or something."

Her concern for spelling also provided her with a way to get attention while writing. One reason for this interpretation is that she always referred to me or the teacher, instead of a peer or a written resource, when she wanted a word spelled. Another reason is that the urgency of her requests for correct spelling were out of proportion to the consequences of having to re-do part or all of her work. Finally, there was the anger she showed when the teacher or I would not work with her on her spelling.

Shannon and I also talked about the stories she had written in her previous classroom and these were often interrelated with those she had read. As with Cathy and Elaine, there was little evidence that Shannon was using these stories to explore themes in her life, even when the intention of the reading and writing was to detect "lessons" which one should presumably be able to apply to one's life. This was most evident in the work in her prior classroom which required Shannon to read and summarize a series of fables and state their "lessons" in her workbook. When she

was showing this writing to me she talked about the stories as if they were objects to be displayed, as opposed to meaning to be communicated:

> Oh, these are the stories I wrote. Whole bunch of them. There was "The Wind and the Sun," "Fisherman and His Catch," and "The Grasshopper and the Ant." "The Fox and the Grapes." "The Two Hawks." See, this is about the wind and the sun, the fisherman and his catch, um, the grasshopper and his ant and the fox and the grapes. I'll show you my favourite story. Want to photocopy these?

As we talked about these stories, Shannon's distance from them became even more striking when she informed me that she had not written some of them. This occurred in the following part of our conversation, when I asked her how she felt about the circles her teacher had made around the spelling errors. She laughed and said she didn't really care because she had someone else do the writing for her. It was as if, to her, the writer and the writing process were irrelevant. What seemed to count most was the product:

> Shannon: I didn't write that. I got somebody to do it for me.
>
> Carol: You did?
>
> Shannon: Yes.
>
> Carol: Somebody else wrote it for you?
>
> Shannon: Yes.

Carol: Your teacher didn't notice?

Shannon: No. See, "City Mouse and the Country."

Carol: How do you feel when you find those circles there?

Shannon: That's her problem.

Carol: Who's problem?

Shannon: Mrs. T.--er--oh--Mrs. [previous teacher] If she doesn't like it don't--See, "The Fox and the Goat," "Tortoise and the Hare," "The Fox and the Grapes," "The Wind and the Sun," "The Fox and the Crow," "The Crow and the Pitcher." Oh, I wrote this one. And the two Frogs.

Even when I asked Shannon to tell me more about her favourite story, "The Crow and the Pitcher," it was evident that she had not been particularly involved with what it might mean to her in real life. In the following example, when she was first asked about the story, she reduced its moral to something that can be quickly summarized and explicitly stated. Then, when she tried to tell me what it meant for her life, it was evident that she was grasping at straws trying to create connections in order to address my question. It is important to note the hesitancy in her speech at this point. It was as if she were struggling to meet my expectations for a meaning that was not really there:

Shannon: I think it's a good lesson because, like,

the moral is, it's often better to use your brains than your brawns. And I thought that [what it] meant was don't give up. Try harder. Because, like, on all of these I wrote the moral and what it meant--because I'm thinking--I'm like--once I was thinking--okay, like, I was thinking I can get the last drop of this juice and I said oh, what I did was [held her mouth on a tap] and finally it dropped.

Carol: I don't understand.

Shannon: Because in the story it was the crow. Okay, he found this pitcher of water and he was really thirsty. So he dropped pebbles in it. But a whole bunch of pebbles wouldn't lift a drop of juice so I sat there for an hour. I used my brains instead of brawn.

Carol: You mean--is that something that happened to you?

Shannon: Yeah. I didn't give up. I tried harder.

Carol: Can you explain that again?

Shannon: I was home alone and I ran out of juice, right? And my sister had to go to the store to get juice. And I was really thirsty and forgot to use the tap and I just sat there and sat there for an hour because my sister ended up going to visit her friends.

Carol. Okay. You were really thirsty.

Shannon: Forgot to use the tap.

Carol: Oh, I see. You sat underneath the tap.

Shannon: No, okay there was a jug of juice....

With respect to the one novel which she read and wrote about in the current classroom, The Chocolate Fever (Catling, 1981), Shannon also indicated that she thought the point of the exercise was to demonstrate you had detected a moral. In a book report which she wrote about the novel, she wrote, "You could learn a lesson from it," without saying what this might be or how it might make a difference to the reader. When I asked her about this, she said she thought the story had been written to get people to stop eating chocolate. She said the only part which linked to her own life was that the boy in the story had to go to the doctor to see what was wrong with him, and this reminded her of when she went to see the doctor about her headaches. When I asked her if she had thought any of the characters might be like herself her reply was, "I just read it to get it finished."

Another example of where Shannon drew superficial connections between what was happening in a story and what was happening in her real life was when I asked her about her writing of a Cinderella story, which she had carried out in her prior classroom. I asked her which character she identified with most in the fairy tale and she replied that

it was Cinderella because "I used to want to be a maid and that." When I asked her what she had been thinking about when she wrote the story she said, "That we're gonna win." It turned out that the school had a writing contest and it was for this contest that Shannon had written the story. In most of Shannon's reading and writing the need to do what was expected and to do it in an impressive way seemed to be what was important.

The one, and very striking exception to this was an essay she had written in her previous school. Titled "Eagles," it was the only piece about which she talked at length, and the only one for which I had the sense that it was truly hers. It was much longer than any other written work she showed me, and it was very neatly written and illustrated with a photograph (of her mother with a hawk which Shannon said her mother's friend had found wounded) and pictures which Shannon had either drawn or cut-out of magazines. The essay was divided into parts in which Shannon described the characteristics, life habits, and relatives of the eagle. She read parts of this to me and spoke about it excitedly:

> Shannon:...and I wrote their home. Just show you what it is. This is the cliff they live in. Okay, this is their perch where they sit on. There's a whole bunch of baby eagles in this nest. See, I put two eagles there [in her picture]. And, uh,

there's their nest.

Carol: Isn't that nice? It looks like you took a lot of care with this. You must have really--this was really important for you wasn't it?

Shannon: Yeah.

She went on to read what was the central question at the end the end of the essay, where there was a picture of baby eagles left alone in a nest. Shannon read this part to me with a great deal of passion in her voice:

"Is this what we want in the end?" And there's a whole bunch of eagles and it says, "Amazingly bald eagles remain a target for poachers due to the high price that is paid for hunters for their eagles feathers. Why?"

Dialogue about this environmental issue could have afforded an opportunity to discuss and critically explore the underlying issues of greed and the exploitation of the innocent, as well as the nature of a society in which natural resources are used and destroyed by a select few in power. As well, to me there seemed to be a connection between the greed and exploitation of the eagle feathers, and her mother's role as a stripper. However, I did not pursue these points with Shannon, because at the time she was enjoying a respite from worrying about what was going to happen to her. It did not seem appropriate at this time to share my thinking about social issues and their possible

relationship to her personal problems.

### Summary of Shannon's Reading and Writing

In relation to everything else that was happening to Shannon, involvement in reading and writing was not a priority for her. When she did complete school-based reading and writing activities, it seemed that what was most important to her was to show her abilities, perhaps to have her teachers see her in a better light. The two exceptions, or cases where she became involved in using literacy for meaningful communication, were the letter she wrote to her teacher and the essay which she wrote about eagles. The former was written at the end of the school year and the latter had been written at another school, so in both cases she did not have opportunities to follow up these attempts with extended dialogue. Such dialogue could have been helpful in enhancing her enjoyment of reading and writing, providing purposes for using print, and helping her understand and formulate action to deal with the problems she was having with others.

CHAPTER EIGHT

# DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study was carried out in order to gain a better understanding of girls' opposition in an inner-city classroom and its relationship to school-based reading and writing. Data collection involved observations and informal interviews with students and teacher in a fifth grade inner-city classroom over a period of six months. The following questions guided the inquiry:

1. How do three girls in a fifth grade inner-city classroom engage in opposition to the teacher's authority?
2. How is this opposition rooted in the girls' social experiences with their families and peers?
3. How is this opposition interrelated with the girls' learning of reading and writing in the classroom?

In this chapter, the findings of the study will be summarized and discussed, and implications drawn for teaching and additional research.

## Summary and Discussion of Findings

### Girls' Engagement in Covert and Overt Opposition

In Chapter Two, opposition was identified as occurring when a student does not accept a teacher's authority over his or her behaviour and learning. As well, it was pointed out that this opposition may be expressed in overt or covert ways. The latter is a particularly important consideration in a study of girls, because prior researchers (Brown &

Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, Lyons & Hanmer, 1990; Gilligan, Rogers, & Tolman, 1991) have suggested that when girls enter adolescence it becomes more difficult for them to express conflict and opposition than it is for boys. This suggestion is consistent with McRobbie's (1991) findings that girls in a British youth subculture did not tend to directly and explicitly oppose teachers the way that boys have been shown to do (e.g., Willis, 1978), but it is inconsistent with McLaren's (1989) observations that girls in his working-class classroom did express open defiance against him and mainstream culture. In the current study it was found that all three girls engaged in both overt and covert opposition against their teacher, and the nature of the opposition varied from girl to girl.

Covert opposition was evident in Cathy's delaying the completion of her work while making use of opportunities to socialize and pursue her private interests in the classroom. This covert opposition had a strategic quality because its success rested on Cathy's sensitivity to the tacit limits her teacher set for behaviour and work completion. It required from Cathy a willingness and ability to comply with her teacher on major matters (for example, the fact that her learning centre activities needed to be completed), and resulted in Cathy gaining freedom and jurisdiction over the relatively minor ones (the extent of the effort that Cathy would put into the centre activities) in exchange for that

compliance. Between Cathy and her teacher, the relationship was thus usually in a state of equilibrium in which each trusted the other.

Like Cathy, Elaine and Shannon both engaged in covert opposition by failing to complete their work but, in contrast to Cathy's covert opposition, theirs did not have a strategic quality. For example, when these two girls socialized during work time in the classroom, they were often loud and disruptive in ways that drew the teacher's attention and tried her patience. They seemed unwilling and/or unable to discern and comply with the teacher's limits for acceptable behaviour and work completion. Because of this, their covert opposition was often interconnected with expressions of conflict, anger, and defiance against their teacher. In the classroom, their conflicts with the teacher were not resolved; and, even when Elaine and Shannon did indicate that they wished to comply with the teacher, their gestures (for example, Elaine's request for homework, Shannon's request for help with her spelling) were not viewed by the teacher as credible. The girls felt their gestures of compliance were rejected by the teacher and this feeling resulted in their rejection of the teacher.

In Cathy's case, strategic and covert opposition was interconnected with a self-fulfilling prophecy in which teacher and child accommodated to each other. But in the case of Elaine and Shannon, their opposition was more

seemingly random as well as overt, and this set the stage for the girls and teacher each opposing the other. As D'Amato (1993) suggests, once this process began, it seemed to take on a life of its own, with disputes and conflicts between teacher and girls becoming increasingly difficult to resolve, even though in contrast to what other researchers have reported about student opposition among students who are not members of the dominant society (e.g., Labov, 1972; Ogbu, 1978; Willis, 1978; Wolcott, 1987), it was quite clear that these girls wished to be in a relationship with their teacher--one in which they could use her structure, focus, and authority to help them understand and deal with their problems.

## Relationships With Adults

Why was it that in this classroom one girl was able to develop trust and strategic compliance with her teacher but two other girls could not, even though the latter two girls wanted to be in a trusting and collaborative relationship with Mrs. T.? In addressing this question, it must be remembered that the teacher had neither the time nor the energy to meet every child's needs, and this meant that she mostly attended to those children who most clearly communicated to her that they wished to make use of her help. When we compare Cathy, on the one hand, with Elaine and Shannon, on the other, it seems that this communication was rooted in the ways that they perceived their

relationships in the family context.

The first difference was the extent to which the girls reported that they had opportunities to dialogue with adults in trusting, protective relationships. In Cathy's case, it is possible that the continuity and talk in her home circumstance had helped her come to see anger, sadness, and disagreement as matters that could be talked out with someone else, had provided her with a basic sense of trust in adults (most evident in the way that she confided freely with me before she came to know me), and had helped her learn strategies for approaching adults and making her needs known to them. (As in her recognition that if one wished to speak to the teacher privately, it was important to signal this with one's tone of voice.) These experiences in the family context helped Cathy establish a context for interpreting her teacher as one who could be trusted, and establish behaviours which resulted in her teacher trusting her.

By way of contrast, neither Elaine nor Shannon indicated that they had sufficient opportunities to engage in dialogue, particularly with respect to problems which they were encountering in the home. It seemed that for Elaine, people were generally uncommunicative with her at home, and there was an indication that she had been told not to discuss family matters while at school. She had difficulty in understanding and talking about even simple

daily events, let alone problems such as parental suicide. She also had difficulty in making sense of her teacher in such a way that would enable her to recognize her teacher as a potential provider of support. In turn, the teacher was left confused and frustrated by her behaviour, and often left her alone, except when it seemed likely that she was going to disrupt the classroom.

Shannon was much more articulate than Elaine was. At first this might seem inconsistent with the degree of instability she experienced in her life. However, from the time she was young she had often stayed in a quasi-foster home arrangement from which another girl, Corinne, seemed to be quite articulate, and it was likely that there was adult-child talk in this context. Nevertheless, Shannon had not been able to build trusting relationships with adults, since her relationship with her own parents seemed to have been characterized by rejection (if not neglect or abuse), and even her quasi-foster mother refused to care for her at one point because of problems which she was said to be causing in the home. She often moved from one place to another, and when authorities intervened, she was not informed as to what was going to happen to her.

Given this history, Shannon did not approach her teacher with the same assumptions about trust which Cathy had. That is to say, she did not assume that her teacher would like her, have confidence in her, and support her.

Because she did not hold these assumptions, her approach to her teacher was one of both clinging and overt opposition, which I think stemmed from a fear of rejection. Her behaviour was particularly difficult for her teacher to read because Shannon arrived in the class after much of the school year was over and at a time when the teacher was increasingly tired from the escalating demands and mixed priorities presented in this class. Thus, in their relationship, opposition escalated over time.

## Peer Groups

As was noted in Chapter Two, many writers have commented on the importance of peer groups in developing resistance toward schooling, and it has been noted that opposition will not be persistent if it is not socially supported (Labov, 1972, 1977; Ogbu 1978, 1987, 1993, Willis, 1978; D'Amato, 1993). However, in this classroom, I found very little social support for opposing the teacher. One likely reason for this lack of support was that the teacher was on good terms with the more dominant boys, often arguing openly with them and negotiating with them the boundaries for their behaviour. In return for this (and often, for her forgiveness for their outrageous behaviour) these boys often supported her by tacitly or explicitly reminding other children of her rules and threatening to enforce them.

A second reason for the children's general support of the teacher was that most of the children enjoyed most of

the activities which she planned for them in all curriculum areas. In this class there was always a tacit or implicit threat that if someone became overtly defiant and this angered the teacher, then all activity would be called to a halt, or at least the child would be asked to leave the room. This supports Erickson's (1993) contention that if the children perceive an intrinsic value in classroom activities, then they are more likely to participate in them. I will discuss this in relation to reading and writing later on.

In this classroom, another reason for lack of social support for opposing the teacher was that there was so little solidarity among the children. The lack of this solidarity was striking, given the extent to which so many researchers either imply or state that for marginalized students, peer groups provide fun, self-esteem, a retreat from broader social pressures, and a positive social identity (e.g., Labov, 1972; McLaren, 1989; McRobbie, 1991; Ogbu, 1978, 1988, 1993; Willis, 1978). In this class, I found children's social interactions and their accounts of them, to be characterized by feelings of intimidation, embarrassment, hurt feelings, and anger.

This finding is more consistent with Brown and Gilligan's (1991) description of girls' peer interactions as being marked by "relational treachery" (p. 100). These researchers state that treachery among friends stems from

their search for relationships in which the girls can develop their own voices while remaining connected to others. They state that prior to adolescence girls frequently express their conflicts and actively search for ways to resolve them. However, when the girls enter adolescence they come under increasing social pressure to remain silent and compliant. This allows girls to remain in relationships, but often at the expense of their developing voice and sense of self. In this classroom, most of the girls were constantly wondering who might be their real friend, if they were to have any friends at all. Their friendships were not based on trust, and without this trust their friendships could not provide a context for meaningful dialogue.

As well, the three girls in this study (and, in fact, all the girls in this classroom) were feeling pressures to acquire a boyfriend, and their need for a boyfriend seemed to dictate some of their behaviour when they were in conflict. Cathy, for example, had learned to hold her tongue and remain silent when she was around boys because she had learned that in this social milieu, she could get into trouble if she appeared to be challenging them. Shannon, on the other hand, was willing to challenge the boys in this classroom, but outside of this classroom, in the broader peer group she felt that she needed to put her physical safety on the line in order to retain her boyfriend.

Conflicts in the peer group were problematic for all three girls, but more so for Elaine and Shannon than for Cathy because their peer interactions were often dominated by older youth who seemed to wield power over them, and involved them in destructive activities such as smoking and fighting. For these two girls there was particular emphasis placed on being tough and on proving oneself in order to be accepted by others. For Shannon in particular, the significance of being accepted by streetwise peers seemed to be related to the lack of acceptance she found among girls her own age and, more importantly, lack of acceptance by adults in her family. Because she was not accepted by adults or her more conservative peers, she engaged in opposition against them. And, because she engaged in opposition against them, they did not clearly communicate that they accepted her.

## Schooling and Future Aspirations

In the prior literature on resistance in schools, it is generally agreed that opposition to schooling is strongest among those children who do not perceive that schooling will make a difference to their future (D'Amato, 1993; Labov, 1972; Ogbu, 1978; Willis, 1978). The findings of this study are consistent with this assertion. Cathy, who had a great deal of faith in the value of schooling, engaged in much more school-based reading and writing than did Elaine or Shannon and was much less defiant in relation to her

teacher. The difference between Cathy and the other girls, however, was deeper than an ability to state a relationship between schooling and success in later life. It involved the ability to understand and tell well-formed stories in which the links between schooling and success in life were both concrete and specific. This ability, in turn, involved a more generalized sense of trust in others and the world, and seemed to be rooted in the conversations that had been had with adults in trusting relationships.

## Relationship With the Teacher

As noted in Chapter Two, language and literacy are learned in social contexts where a child has the opportunity to engage in meaning-making with experienced people who can provide structure for the process, while at the same time letting-go when the child can engage in meaning-making with greater independence. As Erickson (1993) and Van Manen (1991) point out, this classroom context must be one of trust, in which the child has faith in the teacher and the teacher, in turn, has faith in the child. The findings of this study support Erickson's (1993) contention that opposition to schooling occurs in the absence of the trust which is so essential to the pedagogical relationship. Moreover, I found that in this context there were two main impediments to the establishment of this trust between the teacher and some of the girls.

The first impediment was the strain on the teacher,

which was partially the result of her feeling responsible for handling a diverse set of needs in her students, often extreme ones which would be more appropriately dealt with by a trained counsellor. It was also the result of her trying to deliver a curriculum that would be "fun," and "creative," without knowing how to reconcile this approach to teaching with the children's apparently strong needs for structure and control. Because of the constant strain and the dilemmas she faced, she found it difficult to attend to specific children, particularly those whose needs were not clear and who did not indicate that they wanted or would benefit from her assistance. Because of this, her dealings with Elaine and Shannon were often in the context of exchanges that became heated, and which could not be resolved because the teacher turned her attention to the needs presented by the rest of the class. These conflicts between Mrs. T. and the girls remained unresolved, and emotions of anger and hurt were often left to fester until the conflict brought them out again.

The second impediment, which was interrelated with the first, was the lack of some children's willingness and ability to give the teacher the benefit of the doubt when they were ignored or treated unfairly by her. For example, Cathy would "forgive and forget" some of her teacher's indiscretions, engage in subtle manipulations (for example, altering the tone of her voice) to get her teacher's

attention when she thought she needed it, and on one occasion protested explicitly when she disagreed with a particular activity (the home reading program). By way of contrast, Elaine seemingly ignored some of her teacher's contradictory policies but continued to dwell upon and resent them, until her resentment spilled out in angry exchanges with her teacher. For both Elaine and Shannon, experiences in social relationships had not provided a context for approaching the teacher with the same trust and strategies for communication Cathy had. Because they did not have this trust and strategies, their interactions with the teacher were characterized by conflict, and because of this conflict they did not have the same opportunities in the classroom to develop the trust and strategies which Cathy seemed to have acquired outside of the school.

Opposition and Engagement in Reading and Writing

The findings of this study indicate that the factors that were involved in Elaine and Shannon's opposition to the teacher were the same ones that made it difficult for them to become actively involved in school-based reading and writing. Of particular importance to this opposition was the general instability of their lives and the seeming randomness with which, from their point of view, events occurred without a unifying narrative thread through which a conflict might be understood and resolved. In concrete terms, both girls at one point or another had difficulty

just getting to school, let alone being able to focus on academic work once they got there. As well, they had to deal with problems such as a parent's suicide, neglect and rejection, and constant fighting with their "friends." For them, like the women who were interviewed by Horsman (1990), survival was the main priority, and they did what they had to do in order to get by. For Elaine and Shannon, it included hanging around with older youth who involved them in illegitimate and unhealthy activities but who seemed to hold a tacit promise of the kind of security which no one else had offered them. Because of the painful matters which Shannon and Elaine had to deal with, reading and writing simply could not be a priority for them.

Cathy, by way of contrast, was not a girl whose energies were tied up in survival and so for her, involvement in school based reading and writing was much more feasible. As was noted previously, her involvement in reading and writing varied from activity to activity and two factors seemed to account for the difference in her engagement. The first factor was the aesthetic experiences which she had when writing (for example, "daydreaming" when composing a story) and reading (for example, feeling hungry when reading about food). The second factor was the social involvement, such as the prospect of having her creative writing read by a broader audience. Had she not had these aesthetic and social experiences, then it is unlikely that

her literacy growth could have been sustained by the extrinsic values she expressed for literacy learning, such as success in the workplace or avoiding discipline at home.

## Implications for Teaching

As was discussed in Chapter Two, a central challenge in teaching is to mediate children's needs for freedom with their need for structure in their learning and behaviour. In this study, I found that the need for the latter was closely interrelated with the issue of trust between the teacher and the children and among the children themselves. That is, because Elaine and Shannon in particular had experienced instability in their relationships, they had an extra need for stability, predictability and security in the classroom context.

They were not alone in this classroom in this regard, as there were additional children who appreciated it when the teacher exercised her authority, as indicated in the number of children who expressed a preference for the classroom environment in which the teacher strictly monitored their talk and activity. In my opinion, the provision of this strictness for at least part of the day helped the children feel secure and protected in the classroom. Because of the children's response, I would encourage other teachers in similar classrooms to explore with the children their needs and preferences for structure to help them control their behaviour.

As well, teachers in this kind of classroom need to work particularly hard to ensure that all children have access to individual support on a predictable basis. Ways in which this might be achieved could be through a consistently enforced system of signalling for attention, through setting up appointments to meet with individuals, and through using the dialogue journal specifically for private letter-writing with the teacher. These would be helpful in overcoming the problems of children having to compete for attention, which in this study resulted in some children receiving more attention than others.

I would also encourage teachers in this kind of classroom to explore with the children their preferences and needs for guidance in the course of reading and writing. The practice of reading aloud to children is one in which the teacher takes control of the reading process while sharing it with the children, and in this classroom the practice seemed to have positive results both for the children's behaviour and their holistic involvement with books. This is a practice which is particularly important for the many children who, like Elaine and Shannon, can read on their own but are unlikely to do so.

There are additional teaching practices which can enable the teacher to guide the children's thinking while they are engaged in reading and writing. The guided imagery activity, in which Mrs. T. used her voice to help the

children imagine a scenario for writing was one such activity. Another was her practice of providing the children with examples of creative writing and structures to follow for their own. A third activity, which would have been useful in this classroom, is the development of story grammars and story maps which the class can first develop for a shared story and then develop for stories which they read individually (Yellin & Blake, 1994). What these activities have in common is that they enable children to make meaning while engaged with their teacher and then to use the meaning-making process on their own.

In this classroom, Mrs. T.'s priority for reading was that the children would enjoy it. This goal was met for some of the children in this class but not for others, such as Elaine and Shannon. For children like the latter it would be helpful to have greater guidance in selecting texts and, to this end, whole-class and small group activities might include sharing favourite books through providing oral or written book reviews, creating a display of favourite authors, developing a unit on specific genres such as the mystery story, or studying how and why they choose to read particular books. These kinds of activities allow for social sharing of texts in ways that increase the likelihood that the children would seek out books that they could become engaged in.

In this classroom, conflicts among the children

restricted the extent to which the teacher could allow them to engage in small group work. In similar classrooms, the seating arrangement and provision of activities should allow for some time for the children to interact while working, but goals should be set so that the immediate priority is more on the process of group interaction than on the curriculum content. To this end, the children should be involved in establishing rules for small group work, to ensure that conflicts are kept to a minimum. For example, in this classroom the children would likely have agreed to a rule limiting the extent to which group members would be allowed to make negative remarks to each other. They also would likely have agreed to have a chair for each group who would be responsible for ensuring that the children had fair turns to speak.

In the long run, what would be needed to help the children deal with personal conflicts would be an open discussion about the conflicts they had with each other, but unfortunately it is difficult to see how this could occur when children who spoke up were open to harassment by others, and this harassment was often too subtle and widespread for the teacher to monitor or control. One starting point would be for the children to at least have an open opportunity to talk to the teacher about the conflicts they had with her. This could occur in a whole-class structure, with the teacher expressing a desire to better

understand the problems she was having with the class and inviting the children to share with her their concerns. It could also occur through meeting with children individually and establishing with them a journal for communication, as Mrs. T. was eventually able to do with Shannon. If the teacher could talk to the children more about the conflicts she had with them, and work with them to resolve them, then this might model processes of conflict resolution that they could use with each other.

Another starting point might be through the use of literature which involves themes such as "Friendship." If the children could read about and explore friendships among fictional characters, then they might be in a better position to deal with their own. For example, they might examine the dilemmas faced by a character who is torn between two friends, or who is being pressured by friends to engage in destructive activities. They might work together to help the character solve his or her problem and role-play the resolution. As well, they might be invited to write stories about characters who face the same dilemmas they do, and then invite readers of these stories to participate in generating solutions to the conflicts in the stories. In these ways, literature could provide a safe context for exploring some of the issues in the children's lives, even though we would not expect a literacy program to resolve the more extreme ones, such as neglect and abuse.

While children's fiction could be used to help the children explore problems in their own lives, there are also a variety of ways in which reading and writing could be tied more closely for the children to life outside of the school, and thus provide the children with an opportunity to see how they might use what they are learning. For example, in the unit, "Food, Glorious Food," the teacher might have invited guest speakers (a cook, restaurant owner, waiter or waitress, nutritionist, agriculture scientist, grocery store manager and so on) to talk to the children about their work. Follow up activities could involve the children in reading about careers related to food, finding out what is required for entry into various careers, and exploring these careers in relation to their own interests and strengths. This would provide inner-city children with an opportunity other children often have in their homes: an opportunity to think about their futures and explore what one actually does with a formal education.

## Implications for Further Research

The findings of this study indicate that children's behaviour must be interpreted with care because overt opposition can mask a desire for support from the teacher, and covert opposition can mask defiance. Because of this, when future studies are carried out on student opposition, it is important for the researcher to document what he or she means by "opposition" or "resistance," and to document

how the children's behaviour was interpreted for the study, with particular emphasis on identifying the meanings that children give to their behaviour in its social context. It is not a new suggestion (Giroux, 1983), but there are still few studies in which researchers have synthesized information from classroom observations with interview information in order to understand children's opposition in schools.

If additional researchers could carry out this type of study with a variety of students, then we would be in a better position to understand and address their needs. It is thus recommended that follow-up studies be carried out with girls and boys at a variety of grade levels, and from various cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Some of these studies might provide comparative information that could be used to more fully explore whether and how children's gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status give rise to different patterns of opposition. They might also explore the ways in which some aspects of opposition transcend these social boundaries.

It is also recommended that additional studies be carried out to explore the nature of student opposition in relation to a variety of reading and writing programs. These might include classrooms in which the teacher is either more directive or less directive than Mrs. T. was, classrooms in which different reading and writing activities take place

(for example, one in which a basal reading series is used), and classrooms in which there are different priorities in the Language Arts program (for example, classrooms with a greater emphasis on writing but less of an emphasis on reading). As well, it would be useful to explore the nature of student opposition in relation to reading and writing in areas outside of Language Arts, particularly in Health, Science, and Social Studies, where the curriculum often involves the study of social issues.

Finally, and most importantly, it would be particularly helpful to carry out more research into the nature of the support that needs to be provided to schools so that all children have access to adequate opportunities for learning. At the time of this writing, the provincial government has been implementing massive cutbacks in funding for social services, so families with financial and social difficulties now have access to fewer resources, and teachers are reporting that they have to deal with more problems among the children. At the same time, however, teachers have fewer resources to deal with these problems because the government is also implementing cutbacks which are resulting in the reduced availability of teacher aides, consultants, guidance counsellors, Special Needs programs, and even curriculum materials in schools. Moreover, there is a growing public demand for implementing more achievement testing in schools, sometimes with the tacit threat that teachers' jobs will be

at risk if their students do not meet standardized norms, even though these tests deal only with restricted aspects of children's learning. There is also growing pressure to allow for more private schools and charter schools, which could result in an increasing disparity between opportunities provided for children whose parents have more economic and political power and those children whose parents do not.

These trends mean that for Mrs. T. and teachers in similar settings, it is even more difficult to meet children's needs than it was when I was carrying out this study. These trends also mean that research in curriculum and instruction will not be particularly helpful to children and teachers unless it addresses more specifically the politics of schooling in relation to society's distribution of resources and opportunity, and unless it plays an advocacy role in working toward fairness for all children.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Alpert, B. (1991). Students' resistance in the classroom. Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 22 (4), 350-366.

Anyon, J. (1983). Intersection of gender and class: Accommodation and resistance by working-class and affluent females to contradictory sex-role ideologies. In S. Walker & L. Barton (Eds.), Gender, class and education (pp. 19-38). Sussex, England: The Falmer Press.

Au, K. & Jordan, C. (1981). Teaching reading to Hawaiian children: Finding a culturally-appropriate solution. In H. Trueba, G. Guthrie, and K. Au (Eds.), Culture and the bilingual classroom: Studies in classroom ethnography (pp. 139-152). Rowley: Newbury House Publisher's Inc.

Au, K. & Kwakami, A. Cultural congruence in instruction. In E. Hollins, J. King, & W. Hayman (Eds.), Teaching diverse populations: Formulating a knowledge base (pp. 5-24). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Au, K.H. & Mason, J.M. (1981). Social organizational factors in learning to read: The balance of rights hypothesis. Reading Research Quarterly, 17(1), 115-152.

Barr, L. (1989). I won't let the hurt you. Riverwood Press.

Blume, J. (1987). Tales of a fourth grade nothing. Santa Barbara: California.

Bogdan, R.C. & Biklen, S.K. (1992). Qualitative research in education: An introduction to theory and methods. Toronto: Allyn and Bacon.

Brown, L.M. & Gilligan, C. (1992). Meeting at the crossroads: Women's psychology and girls' development. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bruner, J. (1986). Actual minds, possible worlds. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Catling, P.S. (1981). The chocolate touch. Toronto: Bantam Publishers.

Contenta, S. (1993). Rituals of failure: What schools really teach. Toronto: Between the Lines.

Cresswell, J.W. (1994). Research design: qualitative and quantitative approaches. London: Sage Publications.

D'Amato, J. (1993). Resistance and compliance in minority classrooms. In E. Jacob & C. Jordan (Eds.), Minority education: Anthropological perspectives (pp. 181-207). Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corp.

Dahl, R. (1973). Charlie and the chocolate factory. New York: Knopf.

Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (1994) Introduction. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of

qualitative research. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Edelsky, C. (1994). Education for democracy. Language Arts, 71, 252-257.

Ellsworth, N.J. (1994). Critical thinking and literacy. In N.J. Ellsworth, C. Hedley & A. Baratta (Eds.), Literacy: A redefinition (pp. 91-108). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Erickson, F. (1988). School, literacy, reasoning and civility: An anthropologist's perspective. In E.R. Kintgen, B.M. Kroll & M. Rose (Eds.). Perspectives on literacy (pp. 205-206). Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Press.

Freire, P. (1968). Pedogogy of the oppressed (M.B. Ramos, Trans.). New York: Seabury.

Freire, P. & Macedo, D. (1987). Literacy: Reading the word and the world. Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers.

Gilligan, C., Lyons, N.P. & Hanmer, T.J. (1990). Making connections: The relational worlds of adolescent girls at Emma Willard school. London: Harvard University Press.

Gilligan, C., Rogers, A.G. & Tolman, T. (Eds.). Women, girls and psychotherapy: Reframing resistance. New York: Harrington Park Press.

Giroux, H.A. (1983). Theory and resistance in education. New

York: Bergin & Garvey.

Giroux, H.A. (1993). Paulo Freire and the politics of postcolonialism. In P. McLaren & P. Leonard (Eds.), Paulo Freire: A critical encounter. New York: Routledge.

Godfrey, M. (1984). Here she is, Miss Teeny Wonderful. Richmond Hill: Scholastic TAB Publications.

Heath, S.B. (1983). Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Heath, S.B. (1988). Protean shapes in literacy events: Ever-shifting oral and literate traditions. In E.R. Kintgen, B.M. Kroll & M. Rose (Eds.). Perspectives on literacy. (pp. 348-370). Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Press.

Horsman, J. (1990). Something in my mind besides the everyday. Toronto: Women's Press.

Howe, T. (1983). The celery stalks at midnight. New York: Atheneum.

Knoblauch, C.H. & Brannon, L. (1994). Critical teaching and the idea of literacy. Portsmouth: Benyon/Cook Publishers.

Korman, G. (1979). Bruno and Boots: Go jump in the pool. Toronto: Scholastic Book Services.

Kozol, J. (1991). Savage inequalities: Children in

America's schools. New York: Crown Publishers Ltd.

Labov, W. (1972). Language in the inner-city: Studies in the Black English Vernacular. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Labov, W. (1982). Competing value systems in the inner-city schools. In P. Gilmore and A. Glatthorn (Eds.), Ethnography and education (pp. 148-171). Centre for Applied Linguistics: Harcourt Brace Johanovich, Inc.

Lankshear, C. & Mclaren, P. (1993). Introduction. In C. Lankshear and P. McLaren (Eds.), Critical literacy: Politics, praxis, and the postmodern. (pp. 1-56). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Lather, P. (1991). Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy within the postmodern. New York: Routledge.

Maynes, W.G. (1990). The education of Edmonton's urban poor: A policy perspective. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

MacLachlin, P. (1985). Sarah plain and tall. New York: Harper and Row.

McLaren, P. (1989). Life in Schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education.New York: Longman.

McLaren, P. & da Silva, T. (1994). Decentering pedagogy: Critical literacy, resistance and the politics of memory. In P. McLaren and P. Leonard (Eds.), Paulo Freire: A critical encounter (pp. 47-89). New York: Routledge.

McRobbie, A. (1991). Feminism and youth culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen. London: MacMillan Education Ltd.

Mowat, F. (1970). Owls in the family. Toronto: McLelland and Stewart.

National Anti-Poverty Organization [NAPO]. (1992). Literacy and poverty: A view from the inside. Ottawa: National Anti-Poverty Organization.

Ogbu, J. (1978). Minority children and caste: The American system in cross-cultural perspective. New York: Academic Press.

Ogbu, J. (1987). Variability in minority school performance: A problem in search of an explanation. Anthropology and Education Quarterly. 18(4), 312-334.

Ogbu, J. (1988). Literacy and schooling in American cultures: The case of Black Americans. In E.R. Kintgen, B.M. Kroll, and M. Rose (Eds.). Perspectives on literacy. (pp. 227-242). Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

Ogbu, J. (1993). Frameworks: Variability in minority school performance: A problem in search of an explanation. In E. Jacob & C. Jordan (Eds.), Minority education: Anthropological perspectives (pp. 83-109). Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corp.

Robinson, T. & Ward, J. (1991). Belief in self is far greater than anyone's disbelief. In C. Gilligan, A.G. Rogers, & D.L. Tolman (Eds.). Women, girls and psychotherapy: Reframing resistance (pp. 87-104). New York: Harrington Park Press.

Rosenblatt, L.M. (1989). Writing and reading. The transactional theory. In J.M. Mason (Ed.) Reading and writing connections (153-175). Toronto: Allyn and Bacon.

Sachar, L. (1989). Sideways stories from wayside school. New York: Lothrop.

Scollon, R. & Scollon, S. (1982). Narrative, literacy and face in interethnic communication. New Jersey: Ablex.

Searle, D. (1984). Scaffolding: Who's building whose building? Language Arts, 61 (5), 480-483.

Shor, I. (1992). Empowering education: Critical teaching for social change. London: The University of Chicago Press.

Spencer, J. (1976). The value of believing in yourself. LaJolla: Value Communications.

Spradley, J.P. (1980). Participant observation. Orlando: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Street, B.B. (1994). Struggles over the meaning of literacy. In M. Hamilton, D. Barton, & R. Ivanic (Eds.), Worlds of literacy (pp. 15-20). Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Tierney, R.J. & Pearson, P.D. (1988). Toward a composing model of reading. In E.R. Kintgen, B.M. Kroll, and M. Rose (Eds.), Perspectives on literacy (pp. 261-272). Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

Tolkein, J.R. (1984). The Hobbit: Or there and back again. Boston: Houghton Mifflen.

Van Manen, M. (1991). The tact of teaching: The meaning of pedagogical thoughtfulness. London: The Althouse Press.

Vogt, L., Jordan, C. & Tharp, R. (1993). Explaining school failure, producing school success. In E. Jacob & C. Jordan (Eds.), Minority education: Anthropological perspectives (pp. 53-65). Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corp.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes. London, England: Harvard University Press.

Willis, P. (1977). Learning to labour: How working class kids get working class jobs. Westmead:

Saxon House Teakfield Ltd.

Wilson, P. (1991). Trauma of Sioux Indian high school students. Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 22 (4), 367-383.

Wolcott, H. (1987). The teacher as enemy. In G. Spindler (Ed.), Education and cultural process: Anthropological approaches to education(2nd ed.) (p. 136-150). Prospect Heights, Illinois:Waveland Press Inc.